

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

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 30 November 2022**

### **MINUTES**

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

Dr Nik Cunniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Dr Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Christine Farr (Genetics), Dr Gillian Fraser (Pathology), Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, SBS), Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Claire Michel (Faculty of Biology), Dr Nick Mundy (Zoology), 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 Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy, from item 994.1), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

#### **978. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Dr Holly Canuto (Director of Education, MVST), Dr Uta Paszkowski (Plant Sciences, BBS).

#### **979. MEMBERSHIP**

Dr Fulton will be taking an interim role as Chair of the Faculty Board from 1 January 2023 for two terms. An interim Chair of the BSC will be required for Easter and Lent 2023, for which the Faculty will appoint soon.

Post-meeting note: Dr Dee Scadden has accepted the role of Chair of the BSC while Dr Fulton is Chair of the Faculty Board

Dr Christine Farr replaces Dr David Summers as Head of Teaching for the Department of Genetics.

Dr Summers is stepping down from his position as Faculty Chair and therefore the ex-officio position on the BSC will be occupied by the interim Chair of the Faculty Board, Dr Sandra Fulton.

Miss Vianca Shah would be stepping down as Faculty student representative to be replaced by Mr Yusuf Adia from 1 January 2023.

#### **980. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **981. TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY**

Catrin Darsley, the newly appointed Education Officer on teaching sustainability across the University, talked to the Committee about the University's green paper on decarbonisation, sustainability and climate education. This would be relevant to the review of Part IB teaching and would look at learning content, development and critical thinking and consideration of interdisciplinary teaching.

A draft sustainability strategy was being written for which a consultation would be held later. It was likely to recommend things along the lines of:

- Reviewing current practices.
- Potential for collaboration/synergy.
- Assessment of competencies.
- Recognition of time and/or resource issues.

It was not yet expected that courses should explicitly address sustainability. The focus at the moment was finding out what current practices were which would hopefully identify some opportunities. These might not necessarily involve knowledge but instead skills and application of knowledge; transferable skills could also be highlighted, showing how NST students prepared for careers in sustainability.

Catrin Darsley would be happy to talk to individuals and hear the views of people 'on the ground'. It was noted that a medical student group has a scoring system which it applies to Universities to reflect their teaching on sustainability.

Aspects of sustainability already being taught in the NST should be signposted clearly. Activities in colleges were also taking place. Girton had already volunteered as a case study. It may be possible to run a parallel sustainability stream in the future.

Further information would be forwarded to the Committee after the meeting.

***ACTION: secretary to forward contact details of Catrin Darsley so individual members could contact her.***

## **982. MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2022 were circulated and approved.

## **983. MATTERS ARISING**

### **983.1. Shared course rotations (967.1)**

This had been discussed at the Faculty Board. Some concerns about the load on some departments had been expressed. The Council of the School of the Biological Sciences had recently approved extra support for affected departments and the rota is now confirmed.

#### 983.2. Course Organiser and Senior Examiner meetings (967.2)

A meeting for Course Organisers had been held on 24 November. The topic for the meeting was inclusive teaching and a recording of the meeting had been circulated to the Committee and Course Organisers. It was agreed that the meeting was interesting and useful for Course Organisers and that further such meetings should be held. Standards setting and examinations was suggested as a topic for future meetings.

#### 983.3. Examinations for 2022-23 (969)

Following communication with EQPO it had been confirmed that 2023-24 would continue to be a 'transition' year and changes to regulations would not be required for examination papers that fell within the University's assessment Framework. For examinations in 2024-25 however regulation changes would need to be applied as previously. Departments that were considering changes to regulations should start the process as soon as possible and contact the secretary for further information.

#### 983.4. Neuroscience teaching (976.3)

Dr Tim Weil would be holding a meeting with relevant departments and would report at the next meeting.

#### 983.5. Education and Monitoring Review (EMR, 976.4)

This had recently been discussed with Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO). The Chair reported that Part II and III subjects would need to make reports for EMR in Lent 2023, and for Part IA and IB subjects in Lent 2024. It was unclear at this stage what information would be requested but a standard form was to be issued for all subjects where this information was to be entered. Talks on implementation of EMR would be held by EQPO in the next few weeks.

### **984. BNSCR REPORT**

Dr Claire Michel reported. A small focus group was looking at course structure for Part IB and had come up with several models for which a paper was being prepared for just before Christmas.

An intended learning outcomes (ILOs) group was considering all three years of NST biology, and also looking at career progression to identify skills that need to be taught, along with core academic skills.

A total of 11 working groups were running at the moment, so the review was very busy with more meetings being organised.

There was a question of how to encourage engagement with those not directly involved in the review. It was hoped that there would be more impact once some draft proposals could start to be circulated – people needed to know what was being proposed before they could comment. It was suggested that visits to

departments to explain proposals and answer questions might be a good way of encouraging engagement.

Many people were involved in the review but more were needed – it was appreciated that many people were fully focused on delivery of existing teaching so felt they didn't have enough time to devote to a review but it was important to get wider engagement as the review progresses.

#### **985. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS**

Dr Fraser reported. Most students had been enrolled onto a demonstration version of the examinations in Inpera. For some students it would be their first exposure to the software. Training sessions for 'authoring' (setting up papers in Inpera) were being organised. Dr Scadden and Dr Fraser were working alongside Jenny Green at the Student Registry to organise timetables and rooms for examinations. Responsibility for the overall Inpera pilot project was gradually being transferred to the Examinations Office. A 'headquarters' for Inpera had been acquired in the Austin Building, and a Digital Assessment Project Board, Chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education. This has had only one meeting so far.

The use of multiple codes across different Part II subjects for the same paper was discussed. This had the potential to cause administrative confusion and a simpler more consistent system should be considered. Circulated **BSC.22.26a** (Part IA), **BSC.22.26b** (Part IB) and **BSC.22.26c** (Part II) were circulated as lists of all Part IA, IB and II papers and their parent/child relations respectively.

***ACTION: Dr Scadden to discuss the issue of examination codes with the Student Registry.***

#### **986. MODULARISATION OF PART II PATHOLOGY**

A proposal for the modularisation of the Part II Pathology course was circulated as **BSC.22.27**. The proposal was to split the current two-term modules into smaller one-term modules. It also would put on 10 extra lectures before the start of term to bring students up to speed with Part II Pathology.

Duplicate lectures had been removed/merged, such that a total of 250 lectures had now been reduced to 190. A new coursework element would be introduced that would bring the total contribution of submitted work to 25%. It was queried that most Part II subjects had 64% of the overall mark coming from written papers – would Part II Pathology follow this? Reconsideration would be given to this aspect. It was not expected that more 'traditional' project places would be able to be offered.

Some teaching of certain diseases currently taught by staff from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine would be taken over by staff from the Department of Pathology. The Department of Pharmacology expressed an interest in contributing to teaching and suggested an offline conversation for this.

The proposal asked for the project to contribute 20% of the overall mark to reflect the time invested. There was no Faculty policy for this other than that Part II subjects were allowed to have up to 36% of their overall mark contributed by projects and assessment types other than the 4 standard written papers. It was noted that the data handling paper that would be retained in the proposal was a very good discriminator. The proposal fitted in with the University's desire for a greater diversification of assessment, and also fitted in with Helen Duncan's recent talk on how different assessment methods affect different types of student.

The Committee provisionally approved the proposals, a new version incorporating some of the discussion points raised at this meeting would be re-circulated soon.

***ACTION: Dr Fraser to return to the meeting with an updated proposal.***

## **987. SENIOR EXAMINER REPORT SUMMARIES**

Summaries of Senior Examiner reports for the 2021-22 examinations were circulated as **BSC.22.28**. Full versions of these could be viewed on the Faculty webpage at <https://www.biology.cam.ac.uk/exams/nst-exams/senior-examreports>. It was noted that there were some concerns about parity of marking scales. It was requested that thanks be conveyed to the Senior Examiners.

***ACTION: secretary to convey thanks of the BSC to Senior Examiners***

## **988. PART II BBS**

### **988.1. Student Consultative Committee**

A meeting was held on 24 November. Dr Paszkowski, the BBS Course Organiser could not attend the meeting so the secretary reported. Two BBS student representatives had attended. They had queried whether it would be possible to move talks on dissertation production to earlier in the Michaelmas term. This would particularly benefit those students who had a minor subject in the Lent term, so they could make a start on their dissertation in Michaelmas before having to take on a larger lecture load in the Lent term. The overall BBS dissertation discussion would be moved to earlier in the term; departments should consider whether their own departmental talks should also be moved.

***ACTION: Departments to consider moving their BBS dissertation talks.***

#### **989. STEM SMART**

Dr Weil was not present when this item was discussed. However it could be reported that funding had been approved at the Council of the School of the Biological Sciences, so students joining next September will be able to take biology options.

Last year's STEM SMART ran very well, and organisers were looking to expand into other subjects. Very positive feedback had been received and it was felt to be very beneficial for the student participants. Many participants were doing hundreds of questions each, which was a good indicator of student ability and engagement.

When Dr Weil joined the meeting he added that the monies would support academics as well as covering some administrative costs, and would go ahead in January.

#### **990. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes for a meeting held on 11 October were circulated as **BSC.22.29**.

#### **991. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes for a meeting held on 14 October were circulated as **BSC.22.30**.

#### **992. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Applications for NST overall were down, but colleges would be encouraged to take on 20 more students for NST. There were 1212 NST Physical Sciences applications (down from 1361 in the previous year) and 1193 NST Biology applications (up from 1127). The Schools set the target for places but it was unclear whether this took account of the project places available.

***ACTION: Chair to consult with the Secretary of the School to clarify on need for extra places.***

#### **993. ITEMS FOR REPORT**

##### **993.1. Teaching Excellence Framework**

For information, a paper describing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) recently discussed at the General Board's Education Committee was circulated as **BSC.22.31**. The use of NSS (including the foundation year) for NST was not going well, and this needed to be fed back to Gemma Long. Progression to Part III was seen in a negative light by the metrics due to 'low earnings' of these students. It was concerning that earnings were seen as a mark of success when academic and charitable sector salaries are not high.

***ACTION: Dr Weil to feedback to Gemma Long.***

**993.2. Admissions Testing**

A letter from the Chair of the Senior Tutors Committee was circulated as **BSC.22.32**. This referred to a decision by Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing (CAAT) to withdraw from running admissions assessments with effect from 2024-25. This process was currently run with the colleges. Its discontinuation meant potentially more interviews as there was no simple deselection method. The BSC felt that some kind of college-wide admissions testing was necessary. A working group had been formed with people from across the University to consider alternative options.

**993.3. Student discipline procedure consultation (academic misconduct included)**

A Key Issues Bulletin of 4 November reported on a consultation for changes to the student discipline procedure. The relevant item was circulated as **BSC.22.33**. The consultation was open until 20 December. Examiners are encouraged to contribute.

**994. A.O.B.**

**994.1. Payment of Demonstrators**

Demonstrators for Part IA Mathematical Biology had still not been paid for work done in May. This had led to serious difficulties in recruiting demonstrators. It was queried whether this was happening in other subjects – PDN reported that they had experienced no issues.

It was agreed that this was a very concerning issue; although the above cases had been sorted out by the time of this meeting there was reputational damage and a loss of confidence among the pool of people who could be recruited for demonstrating. Costs might initially be borne by departments but ultimately came from Payroll.

*Dr Weil joined the meeting*

The Cambridge Casual Worker System (CCWS) was a new payment system for casual workers at the University of Cambridge. Payment for undergraduate examinations were to be carried out on this system, further information would be made available to departments in due course.

**994.2. EMR for Lent 2023**

It was asked whether PBS could be included for the Lent 2023 assessment rather than 2024 – they should take this up with the EMR team.

**995. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

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

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.