UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Minutes

Date  Wednesday 3 November 2021
Time  2.00-4.00pm

In attendance  Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, Director of Education for NST and PBS), Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant (Faculty Board of Biology rep, Psychology Director of Teaching, PBS Chair of Exams), Dr Guy Jacobs (Faculty Board of HSPS reps), Dr Nik Cunniffe (NST Management Committee rep), Dr Lee de-Wit (PBS Director), Prof Claire Hughes (PBS Subject Convenor), Dr Emma Weisblatt (Chair of PBS DOS Committee).

Co-opted members: Dr Marta Halina (HPS rep)

Student representatives: Ms Kitty Beck (IB), Ms Caitlyn Amey (II)

By invitation: Mr Richard Sellens (Teaching Coordinator)

At  Online

PBS Tripos Management Committee Meeting –
Michaelmas Term 2021

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

1. Apologies
   
   Apologies were received from Prof Simone Schnall (co-opted as Deputy Chair of PBS Examinations), Prof Richard Holton (Philosophy rep), Ms Katy Radcliffe (Faculty Board of Biology student rep), Ms Ruth Parsons (IA student rep), and (for late arrival) Ms Josephine Simmonds (Deputy Departmental Administrator).

2. Change of membership and welcome to new members
   
   a) Ms Ruth Parsons, Ms Kitty Beck and Ms Caitlyn Amey were welcomed as this year's student representatives.
   
   b) Dr Nik Cunniffe is stepping down as NST representative, and will be replaced for the next meeting.
   
   c) Mr Richard Sellens has taken over as Secretary.
   
   d) Prof Simone Schnall remains a member of the committee as Deputy Chair of PBS Examinations.
   
   e) Prof Marta Mirazon Lahr is on sabbatical for this academic year.

3. Approval of minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2021 (PBSMC21.1)
   
   The minutes were received and approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising from the previous minutes (unreserved)
   
   a) Item 3a. Update on proposal for new PBST structure
KPG reported that the item had now progressed through the School committees and would be progressing to the higher level committees next term. Feedback on the proposal had been provided by the Secretary to the Senior Tutors' Committee, and this would be incorporated into a simplified document, suitable for those unfamiliar with the subject or course, before the January Academic Standards and Education Committee (ASEC), which would be an opportunity to receive further feedback. It was agreed that this document would not need to be reviewed by the Committee.

The final run of committees would begin in February 2022.

BPS approval of the changes would also be required; KPG was in the process of writing to the BPS.

SF asked if the proposal going to BPS and to other committees would be seen by the PBS MC, stating it would be unusual for a MC not to see documents about developing a course. KPG assured the committee there would be no new information in these documents from what the committee had already seen and so this was unnecessary. SF noted the committee would wish to know what was being sent and to assist in any way. KPG was grateful but felt help would not be needed.

b) Item 6. National Student Survey

SF had received a copy of the results, which had not been received in time for circulation to the Committee, on which she verbally reported. It was agreed that the Teaching Committee should respond to the comments, with a paper then submitted to the Committee.

Action – RS to continue with request for NSS data from the Faculty Board, for circulation to the Teaching Committee.

c) *Item 7. Borrowing SocAnth paper in IB

The Committee noted that SAN 2 would be available for PBS IB students to borrow from 2022-23.

d) Item 7. IB Neurobiology preparation

EW reported that DoSes were encouraged to review PBS 2 materials to help support students without a science background. She confirmed that Dr David Parker (PDN) had offered to run a cellular aspects introductory session for students at the start of the next academic year; the proposal was well received by the Committee.

Action – EW and RS to arrange the introductory session with David Parker.

5. Annual review of Committee Terms of Reference (PBSMC21.3)

No changes were recommended.

6. Examinations

a) PBS Part I External Examiner Report 2020-21 (PBSMC21.4)
The Part II External Examiner, and PBS Chair of Examiners reports were not yet available for circulation.

LDW noted that the external examiner discussed plagiarism training, and confirmed that he would provide a tutorial for all students.

For this year’s examinations, KPG raised concern about the currently unknown elements, namely the School’s new data retention policy and the length of examinations. Over 40 Part II students had submitted a request for their examinations to be six hours in length. This was considered by the Teaching Committee and discussed at the DoS Committee, with both concluding that three or five hours would be preferable. A decision from the School was pending as to whether five hour examinations could be offered.

Clarification was requested for if and how the examination length would affect those students with extra time allowances. Queries about the data retention policy were also raised. SF noted a policy had been agreed at Faculty Board and asked if this data retention policy had not been received. KPG said it was unclear how to apply it. SF agreed to raise this and the data retention policy with the School of Biological Sciences.

Action – SF to request clarification on examination lengths and the data retention policy from the School of Biological Sciences.

b) Examiners and Course Organisers for 2021-22 (PBSMC21.5)
   KPG confirmed that she would continue to act as the PBS 8 course organiser and examiner until the role could be taken up by someone else. The Committee approved the list of internal and external examiners.

Action – RS to submit the examiners details to the Faculty Board.

c) Approval of Form and Conduct of Examinations notices for PBS papers in 2021-22
   The Form and Conduct notices were not circulated. It was verbally noted that there would not be any major changes. The chair requested the notices to be provided and agreed to ask for approval by circulation.

Action – RS to circulate the notices for approval once available.

7. *PBS 5 Projects (PBSMC21.7)*
   The Committee received the paper.

8. Comments from student members
   a) Part IA
      In RP’s absence, RS reported that some students had asked if and when lectures would be held in person. The Committee reinforced that the University’s position was to review this for Lent Term at the end of Michaelmas Term.

   b) Part IB
KB reported a positive reaction to the PBS 3 course and being able to attend in-person practical classes. Some students were finding PBS 4 to have a heavy workload due to having a Saturday lecture plus practical classes. The Committee agreed that the NST workload was generally high, especially in comparison to the PBS workload, and reassured that the timetable was frontloaded so the workload would ease by mid-Lent Term. KB agreed to relay this back to the students.

c)  Part II

CA reported that overall the students were happy with being able to attend in-person lectures, and having more control over the topics they studied.

At this time, NC, KB and CA left the meeting.

RESERVED BUSINESS

9.  *Minutes from other Committees

a)  PBS Teaching Sub-Committee: Michaelmas Term 2021 (PBSMC21.8)

   The minutes were received by the Committee.

b)  PBS DoS Committee: Michaelmas Term 2021

   Noting that admissions is college business EW reported that for 2022-23 admissions, 906 applications had been received (an increase of 19% on the previous year). This was causing considerable concern and stress for the DoSes, namely in terms of how to manage the interview process. The following solutions had been discussed:

   • Adjusting the deselection policy (LDW and CH were to look into this);
   • Reducing the number of interviews per application from two to one (some Colleges had already implemented this);
   • Including an at-interview assessment (some Colleges had already implemented this).

   It was noted that there were competing pressures from the Colleges and Department to either decrease or increase student numbers. KPG reported that the Department had reviewed the number of students through the restructure of the tripos, in which it was found that there would be room for expansion. She noted that the bulge last year had demonstrated that these extra numbers could be accommodated, but alternative lecture theatre space would be required. Departmental resources had also be reviewed as part of the BPS reaccreditation process.

   CH noted that the sense of stress DoSes were experiencing could impact the Department and contribute to the growing trend of casualisation of College work through the use of post-docs and assistants. SF agreed to pass this on to the Senior Tutors' Committee.

   Action – SF to pass on DoS concerns with the Senior Tutors' Committee

   KPG recommended a review of application numbers from previous years to assess whether PBS was an exponentially growing subject and, if yes, to request support accordingly.

   SF asked whether the department had considered requesting PBS become a managed numbers subject but KPG was strongly opposed to such an approach to the issue
SF pointed out that more UTOs will not solve admissions or supervisor shortage unless the UTOs join a college

**Action – SF to raise a request for details admissions statistics with the University's admissions numbers management committee.**

LDW suggested a new form of pre-interview assessment in the form of a five minute presentation to applicants followed by multiple choice questions. This could provide clearer results than essays for assessment, but would require an investment for the upfront costs to facilitate. KPG agreed to raise this with Mark Johnson, CH agreed to raise this with Sam Lucy.

**Action – KPG and CH to raise the proposal with Mark Johnson and Sam Lucy respectively**

SF recommended that Sam Lucy be invited to the next Committee meeting to discuss the topic further.

**Action – RS to invite Sam Lucy to the next Committee meeting**

*At this time, EW left the meeting.*

d) Psychology Department Teaching Committee: Michaelmas Term 2021

No items were raised for discussion.

10. Management of transfers into PBS Part I

This had been raised during the PBS DoS Committee meeting and was discussed by the Committee. It was noted that Philosophy had mitigated a similar issue by becoming a numbers managed course.

11. Plan for exam mode change on PBS 7 in 2022-23 (LDW) (PBSMC21.11a)

LDW reported that the University was encouraging new diverse forms of assessment. He therefore proposed the use of oral examinations to replace written examinations, with the details outlined in the paper. This was well-received by the Committee, who recommended that it be proposed to the Biological Sciences Committee (BSC); the paper to BSC should include clarifications for those unfamiliar with the course and subject, note that PBS 7 was an optional paper, highlight the importance for transferrable skills and diversifying assessments, and note that students would relatedly be set formative oral assessments in Part I to help prepare them.

**Action – LDW to update the paper with the Committee's recommendations, for submission to the BSC.**

12. Subject Convenor’s Report (CH)

No points were raised as these had been discussed as part of Item 9b.

13. Any other business

No other business was raised.

14. Dates of meetings for 2021-22

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<tr>
<th>Lent</th>
<th>Wednesday 9 February 2022</th>
<th>2.00pm</th>
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<tr>
<td>Easter</td>
<td>Wednesday 11 May 2022</td>
<td>2.00pm</td>
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