Department of Psychology PBS Management Committee Meeting – Easter Term 2021

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

1. Apologies
Fiona Craig, Marta Mirazon Lahr, Richard Holton, Jennifer Grint. Nik Cunniffe would have to leave at 2.30pm.

2. Approval of minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10 February 2021 (1)
The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the previous minutes

a) New PBS Tripos structure
This has now been approved by all relevant Committees in the School: the Biological Sciences Committee, and latterly, the NST Management Committee, which had taken place the previous day. The University-level committees would now consider the item for the final round of approvals. For the Academic Standards and Education Committee, draft regulations and more detailed proposals on assessment strategies and curriculum were required. KPG and LDW will work on this over the summer with Course Organisers. If this had been highlighted earlier this could have been done alongside the existing preparation. It was noted that the course is already very successful with regards to diversity and widening participation, so it is unfortunate to be held back to 2024-25. The Mental Health paper planned for IB was likely to be very popular. KPG noted the potential for the Department to be involved in a Clinical Psychology doctorate in future.
KR and EW thanked KPG for her work in designing the new Tripos, which was widely regarded as a very exciting development and offered to help in any necessary further student or DOS consultations.

In 2020 there had been roughly 10 applicants per place on PBS (768 applicants in total), which was much more popular than medicine. KPG had reviewed admissions statistics during preparations for the Learning and Teaching Review in 2018, and had been pleased to see how well PBS was achieving its diversity and equality aims. CH was thanked for her essential role in managing the outreach strategy.

It was agreed that this Committee should be updated with progress on curriculum development for the new Tripos, although curriculum design would remain within the Department. The draft regulations will come to this committee. SF noted that the Committee could also monitor resource implications if any arose. KPG stated that the new structure will ultimately bring efficiencies, learning from the experience that resource requirements had not been sufficiently reinforced when the original PBS Tripos was created. The Department had agreed with Head of School Prof Anna Philpott that no further resources would be required.

4. Response to expected student return date of 17 May
Most teaching has now finished. KPG noted that the Department’s Silver Team had agreed to open some areas of the building for small research group meetings, but there would be no face-to-face teaching. CH noted that the Main Building was also undergoing significant refurbishment, to include: new testing suites, gender-neutral toilets/showers, renovation of some teaching rooms, turning the Nick Mackintosh Seminar Room into a more flexible teaching and social space, and creation of an outdoor seating area. These improvements will hopefully be worth the wait.

KPG explained that due to 24hr online exams, the exam period had been stretched. The consequence was that it was very difficult to have examiners’ meetings in time for students to graduate during General Admission. However, the examiners had worked out a plan to facilitate this and will be submitting the grade rosters and class lists on Monday 28 June. Option papers have also agreed to send marks earlier. The DOS Committee was grateful on behalf of students. KB noted that final-year students were very grateful for the Department continually putting students first.

5. Student Feedback Lent Term 2021 (2)
UTO responses to student feedback from Lent Term 2021 were circulated. SF noted the positive feedback and positive responses where there were suggestions for change. KB stated that IA students were impressed with the Department, were enjoying what they had been learning, and were thankful for the Department’s support. KR noted that because of the wide-ranging cohort of students on PBS papers, Psychology was regularly compared with other departments and was often considered very good in comparison. KPG thanked LDW for his essential role in overseeing much of this work. The Department has a good relationship with its students, which enables everyone to work together. A benefit of the Department being in control of its own Tripos was that we know our students more than other larger Triposes might. It was also noted that there are some smaller Triposes that do not engage as much. LDW noted the support of administrative staff in enabling good
communication with students. It was suggested that PBS might think about how to share best practice in this regard.

6. National Student Survey (3)
Members received a breakdown of responses by department. At the close of the survey, 21 PBS students had responded (36%), 8 students short of the 50% threshold required for publication of the results. **Post-meeting note: NSS data will still be received, but cannot be used in publicity.** KPG wondered if there was still uncertainty about the NSS. KR noted that the SU had suggested a boycott of the NSS again this year, on the grounds that it is used nationally to pit universities against each other. It was noted that administrative resource is put into advertising and managing the NSS at Cambridge, and in order for this to be worthwhile, students must trust it and academics must find it useful. It was noted the NSS feeds into league tables. It was suggested that the university should be asked to review whether participation in the NSS was necessary.

**ACTION: SF to take the Committee’s points on the NSS to the Faculty Board for consideration, with a view to passing up through further committees.**

7. List of optional papers for PBS Tripos in 2021-22 (4)
There was little change from the previous year. In 2020-21, Criminology at IB was very popular and seems to have soaked up interest from the SOC3 paper, which was capped for the first time. A few emails had been received from students who would have liked to have seen a Social Anthropology paper in the second year. This is true every year. While there used to be a SocAnth paper at IB in PBS, SocAnth stopped running that paper and declined to permit borrowing of a replacement paper. This has been revisited several times since. It was noted that the SAN1 paper is the second most popular at PBS IA, with 32 students, the most popular paper being from BioAnth.

**ACTION: KR and RS to ask students who took SAN1 whether they would have taken a SAN paper at IB if one had been available.**

**ACTION: LDW to approach the Director of Teaching in SocAnth to revisit paper borrowing at IB.**

KB noted the extreme enthusiasm among IA students in choosing their IB papers – many were struggling to decide because of the wealth of interesting papers on offer. Criminology and HPS are likely to be popular. HPS was considered quite different from papers at IA. The IA students were grateful for the diverse, large range of papers. KR noted that the optional paper booklet suggested that some preliminary work might be needed for the Neurobiology paper for those without a science background. It was asked whether the Department could make some of this work available to help students decide if they want to take the paper to ensure equivalent provision across colleges.

**ACTION: EW and LDW to raise Neurobiology prep with DOS Committee, to aim for consistency and sharing of existing materials and good practice.**
It was agreed to delay the deadline for receipt of paper choices until Friday 23 July (one week after receipt of grades).

8. **Comments from student members**
   a) Part IA – KB noted that while some students had struggled with PBS2 practicals, all the Q&As and extra sessions were really helpful, especially with coding.

   b) Part IB – MG noted that IB students had been grateful for the revision sessions for PBS4, and lots of students were hoping to join. There was some anxiety among IBs about the possibility of next year being their first set of traditional exams. KPG and LDW were aware of the issue and will work on this, coming up with something to help build confidence, and will probably seek student input. At the moment, it is too far ahead to say for certain what will happen next year. EW noted that all DOSs, Tutors, and Senior Tutors were thinking about this. SS, as Chair of Exams, considered that the Department had done well in the last two academic years to find novel solutions for examinations in difficult circumstances, and was ultimately pleased with the changes, most of which would have been unimaginable two years ago.

   KR echoed the sentiments of KB and MG.

   c) Part II – JG was not present.

   The Committee thanked the student reps for their input and engagement during their time on the PBSMC, and wished them a successful exams season and enjoyable summer break.

**RESERVED BUSINESS**

9. **Minutes from other Committees**
   Members received minutes from:

   a) **Staff-Student Committee (5)**
   The committee had been trouble-shooting throughout the year. Last year, the survey of Part II students as they leave was simplified. This summer, after exams, we could ask what they have and have not liked. Director of Curriculum Development and Online Learning Deborah Talmi had spoken to a small group of self-selecting students about this. LDW would also like to ask students for their opinions about how the Department has attempted to bring into the curriculum more issues of racial prejudice and diversity. LDW will write a document on this and send to the students. SF noted that the new Black Advisory Hub would be a good collaborative resource, and information on its launch event was circulated. LDW suggested that there might be some value in thinking about which questions from the NSS the Department is interested in and including these in our own surveys. Previously, such questions might not have been asked in departmental surveys as they were asked in the NSS, but with such low participation this information was now missing. RS suggested recruiting student reps for next year at the end of this term so they could introduce themselves in inductions. This was agreed to be a good idea. It would help with integration of students and might also encourage IAs to come forward as reps.
b) PBS Teaching Sub-Committee (6)
LDW noted that this meeting had largely been about how to manage exams and General Admission. An earlier deadline, while initially more stressful for examiners, would ultimately bring the term to an end earlier. It was noted that other departments might not be able to bring forward examiners’ meetings.

d) PBS DoS Committee (7)
EW will be working with JS, RS and FC on an accessibility audit for the Department and had signed up for a related training session as Disability Champion. There had been discussion about supervisor groups or sessions for particular PBS courses. This was not seen as a departmental task, but where there were experienced supervisors or DOSs who wanted to do this voluntarily, it would be helpful. It would not require advance preparation but needs both experienced and new supervisors in the session. There had been discussion about transfers and Deborah Talmi’s work on lecture formats, which were going through other channels. KPG had presented guidance on supervisions for Easter Term, and there had been discussion on diversifying teaching in supervisions without losing ability to cover content, with DOSs sharing ideas for tasks.

10. Transfers into PBS (KPG, LDW)
The committee noted this had been an ongoing topic this year. LDW noted that transfers for Part II currently go through the PBSMC, and there had been a suggestion to remove this step. However, this had been considered too much of an onus on DOSs without guidance from the Department, so LDW had worked with SS and Jane Garrison to draft guidance, which was presented to the Teaching Committee. The TCM noted an additional point: the PBSMC adjudication role on Part II transfers maintains oversight of project numbers in the School. There had been a question of whether such students should go through the NST allocation route first.

KPG noted that the School has to ensure enough project places. On NST this is done via the allocation round. If medics apply directly to PBS, they are effectively bypassing this competitive route to getting a project. Psychology has a certain number of projects and a commitment to provide all existing PBS Part II students with a project. KPG therefore proposed that for each MVST or NST student permitted to enter PBS Part II directly, the Department will need to reduce their number of projects for the NST allocation round – otherwise Psychology will consistently be taking on more and more projects, despite the fact that resources are already limited. This proposal would not apply for students transferring in from other Triposes. There will still be NST Part II Psychology and PNB project places, but there must be fewer on NST Part II Psychology if MVST and NST students bypass the NST allocation system and move directly to PBS.

It was noted that given the support from the Colleges, the Committee had no power at present to refuse the transfer requests if the student was supported by DoS. It was agreed that this situation was untenable for the future. Taking on students via this route increases risk, reduces transparency, and creates unfairness for students – who are competing for places via multiple, completely independent processes.

It was agreed there would be merit in imposing a numbers cap on project places in Part II PBS on an annual basis. It was proposed that PBS should have a set project
number at Part II, agreed in the February of each year (like NST), which would then allow refusal of applications above that cap. Transfer applicants would need to be ranked if they were competing for limited places. A deadline should be set. Further advice was needed whether regulations would need to be amended.

**ACTION:** SF to ask Chad Pillinger and Fiona Russell for advice on the transfer process, taking into account PBS regulations. This group should seek advice from Alice Benton if necessary.

**ACTION:** SF and KPG to raise Psychology projects and Part II transfers with the Faculty Board and NSTMC.

There was no desire to make PBS a numbers managed subject at admission at IA. Increased PBS admissions for 2020-21 was largely to do with A-level results problems, and Admissions Tutors will not allow this to be an ever-expanding number. The Subject Convenor would look carefully at success rate per college in this for the coming round. The diverse range of applicants was noted and that the Tripos is very popular from students with a broad range of A-level subjects. This is gratifying and in line with the PBS diversity strategy.

MH asked if all Psychology project supervisors were in the Psychology Department. KPG noted that in two years’ time, there will be a very large cohort (c.90) at PBS Part II. The Department will be collaborating with other departments (MRC CBU, Education, Psychiatry) for additional Psychology-related projects. Each supervisor from an external department would work with a Psychology mentor to ensure sufficient scientific requirements and meeting the BPS criteria, as well as to assist on project-specific issues. MH noted that she is a colleague of Psychology UTO Lucy Cheke in the Centre for Intelligence, and might be able collaborate on a project.

**ACTION:** KPG and MH to discuss possible HPS/Psychology projects.

11. **Student transfer requests:** PBS Part II (8, 9, 10a-c, 11)

It was noted that it was difficult to add anything beyond the DOSs’ comments and that it was useful to see the level of DOS support.

Application item 8, a medic from Downing, was approved.

Application item 9, a medic from St. Catharine’s, was approved.

Application item 10a-c, a Philosopher from Pembroke, was approved. It was noted that for Philosophers, the NST IB Experimental Psychology plus NST Part II Psychology route was BPS accredited, but it was confirmed that the student understood that the proposed PBS route was not accredited.

Application item 11, a medic from Girton, was approved.
It was hoped that these requests were not a means of getting a guaranteed project, or because students thought PBS Part II was easier than NST Part II Psychology.

12. Any other business

13. Dates of meetings for 2021-22

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<tr>
<th>Michaelmas</th>
<th>Wednesday 3 November 2021</th>
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<td>Lent</td>
<td>Wednesday 9 February 2022</td>
<td>2.00pm</td>
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<td>Easter</td>
<td>Wednesday 11 May 2022</td>
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