Present:  Prof Ian Colbeck (Chair), Mrs Olivia Pink, Dr Michael Steinke, Maya Liliana Avramescu (MSc Molecular Medicine), Bethan Greenwood (MSc Tropical Marine Biology), Jason Man (MSc Environment and Resource Management), Taewoo Kim (MSc Biotechnology)

In attendance: Miss Nicola Andrews

Apologies: Joseph Romain (MSc Tropical Marine Biology), Dr Ralf Zwacka

MINUTES

01/15 The minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2015 were approved as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

02/15 It was assumed that all matters arising from the last meeting had been actioned.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF COURSES (ARC) 2014/15

03/15 Prof Colbeck explained that the purpose of the Annual Review of Courses (ARC) was to review the MSc Courses, Student Assessment of Modules and Teaching (SAMT), student feedback and the External Examiner Reports to plan for the forthcoming academic year. He advised that the deadline for the submission of the ARC to the Academic Standards and Partnership Office was 1st February 2016 and Miss Andrews would circulate a copy of the ARC to the Student Course Representatives in mid January for information.

Action: NA, Student Course Representatives

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT – MSC TROPICAL MARINE BIOLOGY

04/15 Prof Colbeck reported that two Exam Boards were held during the year. The purpose of the Interim Exam Board in June was to ratify the coursework marks and offer reassessment in order for the students’ to progress to the Research Project. The Final Exam Board in November was to ratify the Research Project marks and award the degree classifications. He explained that following the Final Exam Board, the External Examiners submit a report and the School was required to respond to any issues raised by the External Examiner.

05/15 The External Examiner Report for the MSc Tropical Marine Biology Course was noted by the Committee. Dr Steinke advised that the External Examiner’s comments had been positive. He explained that it was his first visit to the School and he was keen to learn how the course was structured and designed. The MSc Environment and Resource Management, MSc Biotechnology and MSc Molecular Medicine reports had yet to be submitted and these would be brought to the Spring Term meeting.

Action: NA
06/15 The results of SAMT for 2014-15 were noted. Prof Colbeck explained that Module Supervisors were asked to examine the feedback with scores below 3.5 and advise on how they planned to increase the score in the future. It was noted that the BS781 results were incorrect as the students had answered questions about the lab-based project; however they were not involved with lab-based projects. In light of this, all students would be asked to ensure that they answered the questions correctly. Prof Colbeck advised that the students’ would receive an e-mail with an on-line link to the SAMT questionnaire and the Student Course Representatives were asked to encourage their peers to complete the questionnaires as they were important for the School to obtain feedback about the modules.

**Action: Student Course Representatives**

**STUDENT FEEDBACK ON TIMELINESS AND QUALITY OF FEEDBACK**

07/15 The MSc Biotechnology students’ had not received feedback on the BS985 Summary of a Scientific Paper which was submitted on 30th October. Professor Colbeck advised that the School’s policy for the marking of PGT coursework assignments was three weeks. Miss Andrews was asked to follow it up with the Module Supervisor.

**Action: NA**

08/15 Dr Steinke commented that some of the Tropical Marine Biology students had uploaded ODP and JPG files to FASER for their coursework assignments and he had been unable to provide feedback. Miss Avramescu advised that the students could change their file extension to enable them to upload the files. Dr Steinke would ask the students to resubmit their file in the correct format and request that students’ submit their assignments using the correct file format in future.

**Action: MS**

**MATERIALS ON MOODLE AND IN COURSE/MODULE HANDBOOKS**

09/15 The Student Course Representatives advised that they found the papers on Moodle helpful, in order they could read them in advance of the lectures. Mr Man commented that reading material for the BS702 (Natural Resources) module was not available on Moodle and Prof Colbeck agreed to follow it up with the lecturer.

**Action: IC**

**OPERATION OF PGT SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS**

10/15 Professor Colbeck reminded the Student Course Representatives that students should visit their MSc Course Director for pastoral care. He advised that the Talent Development Centre located in the Student Hub offered help and advice with academic writing and referencing.
ITEMS FROM STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

MSc Molecular Medicine

11/15 The students raised that the first set of feedback for the BS934 Assignments 1 and 2 had not been constructive enough and it did not help them improve for future assignments. The students were advised to check the text boxes below the mark grids in order to view the comments from the marker. In addition, all calculations had been placed on Moodle and the students were advised of this. In another assignment, a separate feedback file was uploaded to FASER and the students were advised to check their FASER account. Those students who were still not happy with their feedback or had any questions were encouraged to contact the Module Supervisor directly for further discussion. Miss Avramescu agreed to feedback the information to the MSc Molecular Medicine students.

Action: MA

12/15 Some Molecular Medicine students undertaking BS320 (Human Molecular Genetics) as an optional module commented that the lecture content did not include sufficient information at postgraduate level and they had not found the module challenging enough. Prof Colbeck explained that the module was catering for a diverse group of students and it was difficult to teach at a level to accommodate all students. The issue would be discussed further at the next teaching meeting.

Action: IC

13/15 Miss Avramescu commented that she found it difficult to understand and analyse old papers for coursework assignments, in particular those prior to the 1990’s as she found the language difficult and the lay out confusing. Dr Steinke explained that sometimes it was important to use seminal papers from 20/30 years ago as a number of recent developments were based on original papers. He advised that students would be disadvantaged if academic staff were unable to use older material in coursework assignments and therefore it was important that the School did not restrict papers that were 10/20 years old. Prof Colbeck suggested that the students were set a formative assignment in order to practice their summarising and evaluating skills prior to the BS936 (Professional Skills and the Business of Molecular Medicine) Summary of a Scientific Paper assignment. Prof Colbeck would discuss his proposal with Dr Zwacka.

Action: IC, RZ

MSc Tropical Marine Biology

14/15 The students raised concern over the format of the BS707 (Methods in Tropical Marine Biology) Remote Sensing Practical as it had been their first experience using ‘R’ software. Dr Steinke advised that there were some good marks ranging from 50 – 70%. He agreed that in future he would include further practical advice in the seminar prior to the practical session and give the students clear guidance on using ‘R’ software.

Action: MS

15/15 Two students had been unable to submit the BS708 Essay Assignment which was due for submission during the second week of the autumn term (8th October) as they had not registered for the MSc Tropical Marine Biology Course. Dr Steinke advised that he was aware of the situation and he had spoken with the students concerned. He would address the situation in order that the students were not disadvantaged.
The students were keen to begin focussing on their Research Project and had requested a meeting with potential project supervisors. Dr Steinke advised that he hoped to schedule a meeting on 10th December to give the students an overview of the research project and meet with potential project supervisors. If the meeting did not take place at the end of the autumn term, he would arrange it for early January.

The students advised that they had submitted their medical questionnaires for the BS705 field trip to Indonesia, however they had not received the invoices for the trip. Dr Steinke agreed to follow this up with Professor Smith.

MSc Biotechnology

It was noted that the MSc Biotechnology students did not receive an e-mail advising that a BS985 Professional Skills and the Business of Biotechnology had been cancelled. It appeared that an informal e-mail had been sent to the MSc Molecular Medicine students on the BS936 Professional Skills and the Business of Molecular Medicine module but they had not included the MSc Biotechnology students. Prof Colbeck agreed to remind the MSc Course Directors to notify both sets of students when cancelling certain shared lectures.

MSc Environment and Resource Management

Mr Man raised that the students received a lecture on architecture in the BE965 module run by the Essex Business School and he questioned the relevance of the lecture topic to his degree course. Prof Colbeck explained that lack of space was relevant to people’s environment and well being and the lecture topic was used as an example.

Mr Man enquired about the possibility of introducing a zero weighted Biological Sciences module. Prof Colbeck explained that the MSc course was in its last year, so it was unlikely that it would be introduced. He advised that students were welcome to attend lectures for a specific module; however they would have to speak to the lecturer and obtain their permission.

Mr Man advised that it would be useful to obtain a common list of science terminology as he had undertaken his Undergraduate degree in the Essex Business School. Prof Colbeck agreed to provide him with a list of standard definitions.
NOMINATION OF SSLC REPRESENTATIVE TO ATTEND SCHOOL MEETING

22/15 The Student Course Representatives were asked to nominate a fellow representative to attend the School Meetings and Miss Avramescu confirmed that she would be happy to attend the Spring Term meeting, with Miss Greenwood attending the Summer Term meeting. Miss Andrews advised that the Spring Term meeting would be held on the morning of 24th February in the School Seminar Room (Room 6.22). The date of the Summer Term meeting will be confirmed in due course.

Action: MA, BG

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

23/15 Mr Kim enquired whether the BS934 (Gene Technology and Synthetic Biology) exam results could be published earlier to avoid the students waiting until June when the Interim Exam Board had taken place. Prof Colbeck advised that provisional results would be released after the exam had taken place and the MSc Biotechnology and Molecular Medicine students would be informed that they were provisional until the marks were formally ratified by the Board of Examiners at the Interim Exam Board meeting in June.

24/15 Some MSc Biotechnology students flagged that there had been some poor communication concerning the BS320 (Human Genetics) Essay title. The students had e-mailed the Module Supervisor with proposed essay titles, however the Module Supervisor had not responded to their e-mails. Prof Colbeck agreed to follow it up with the Module Supervisor.

Action: IC

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

25/15 The next meeting would take place during Week 24 of the Spring Term, and would be scheduled by Miss Andrews.

Action: NA