Present: Prof Ian Colbeck (Chair), Prof Chris Reynolds, Dr Michael Steinke, Dr Ralf Zwacka, Maya-Liliana Avramescu (MSc Molecular Medicine), Taewoo Kim (MSc Biotechnology), Jason Man (MSc Environment and Resource Management), Joseph Romain (MSc Tropical Marine Biology)

In attendance: Miss Nicola Andrews, Mr James Norman, Mrs Olivia Pink, Ms Clare French (Sub-Librarian), Mr Greg Cadge (Assistant Librarian)

Apologies: Bethan Greenwood (MSc Tropical Marine Biology)

MINUTES

26/15 The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2015 were approved as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

03/15 Annual Review of Courses (ARC) 2014/15

Miss Andrews reported that the Annual Review of Courses (ARC) for 2014/15 had been circulated to the Student Course Representatives and MSc Course Directors and no comments had been received.

08/15 Files Submitted to FASER

Dr Steinke confirmed that the issue of submitting ODP and JPG files to FASER had been resolved. He advised that the default setting in Windows 365 Word only allowed ODP files and it was necessary to manually change the file extension.

14/15 Guidance on ‘R’ Software

Dr Steinke explained that a practical session involving the use of R software was timetabled too early in the autumn term when the students only had three weeks of ‘R’ knowledge. He confirmed that in future the practical session would concentrate on effective figures and it would move away from excessive use of ‘R’.

15/15 BS708 Essay Assignment

Dr Steinke confirmed that in future the BS708 Essay Assignment would be marked for formative purposes only.

17/15 BS705 Field Trip

Dr Steinke confirmed that the issues about the Indonesian Field Trip had been resolved. There had been a delay in sending out the invoices; however the invoices had been distributed to the students for the field trip costs.
EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS

27/15 The External Examiner reports for MSc Biotechnology/Molecular Medicine, MSc Environment and Resource Management and MSc Cardiac Rehabilitation were noted. Prof Colbeck advised that the External Examiner for the MSc Biotechnology/Molecular Medicine courses felt that one written exam was not enough and they would like to see more exams included in the course structure. The Student Course Representatives confirmed that they preferred coursework as they felt they were assessed in a similar way to the exams. They commented that international students found the multiple choice questions easier and essay questions more difficult due to English not being their first language. It was noted that there were both advantages and disadvantages for having additional exams for the MSc Biotechnology and Molecular Medicine courses.

LIBRARY FACILITIES

28/15 Prof Colbeck introduced Clare French (Sub-Librarian) and Greg Cadge (Assistant Librarian) from the Albert Sloman Library. Ms French introduced Greg Cadge and explained that he would be helping to support the science subjects. She explained that a new extension had been added to the Library building which contained additional books, sockets and a Postgraduate Room and she had been invited to attend the meeting to obtain feedback from the students. She advised that there was an on-line survey with an opportunity of an Amazon voucher to be won and encouraged the Course Representatives and their peers to complete it.

Action: Student Course Representatives

29/15 Ms French enquired whether the students used the Library Database to search for journals/papers. The Student Course Representatives confirmed that they used the Library and used Encore to search for journals. She advised that Dr Greg Brooke, the School Library Officer had met with the Library and he had requested a full text filter as this would help students to search for journals. Ms French reminded the Student Course Representatives that the Library could also obtain papers/articles from the British Library using the inter-loans facility and there was an ongoing conversation between the Library and the School regarding the journal subscriptions the School wished to use. Dr Steinke commented that academic staff often advised the students to e-mail the authors as it was a quicker route than asking the Library to obtain copies of papers.

30/15 The Student Course Representatives raised that the Wi-Fi in the old part of the Library (3rd and 5th floor) was extremely poor. Ms French advised that Library had boosted it as much as they could and they also use the Wi-Fi from the Student Centre, however she explained that it was difficult because the building was old and it contained a large number of books.

31/15 Ms French enquired whether the Student Course Representatives thought that the fines were appropriate. The Student Course Representatives advised they were sufficient and felt it might be useful to raise the amount in order that students’ did not hold onto books. Ms French reported that the Library plan to remove book fines in the future and were considering increasing the fees of the re-call fines.

32/15 Some discussion took place about the Reading List system. Ms French advised that it was possible to place any link from the web or link Moodle to the reading lists and she agreed to liaise with Dr Greg Brooke about attending a meeting to talk to the academic staff about it.

33/15 Ms French thanked the Student Course Representatives for their feedback and commented it had been useful to attend the meeting. It was agreed that she would attend future meetings to obtain feedback from the students and a regular slot would be included on the agenda.

Action: NA, CF
STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS 2014/15

34/15 The Student Satisfaction Survey results for 2014/15 were noted. Prof Colbeck advised that the number of responses was extremely low which had made the results a very low percentage. He asked the Student Course Representatives to encourage participation from their peers to complete the survey and reminded them that a variety of prizes could be won for completing the survey. Miss Andrews was asked to circulate the web link to the survey to the Postgraduate Taught students.

Action: Student Course Representatives, NA

PROMPTNESS OF FEEDBACK

35/15 The Student Course Representatives confirmed that feedback was usually returned promptly apart from some odd assignments and advised that they would like to be kept informed if coursework would be returned late.

Action: NA

USEFULNESS OF FEEDBACK

36/15 Prof Colbeck explained that ideally students should be able to use feedback to improve on their next assignment; however staff were limited to providing feedback before the next assignment submission due to the turnaround time for the marking of coursework. The Student Course Representatives commented that some lecturers gave generic feedback and they felt it was helpful as it enabled feedback to be released quickly to the whole course group. Mr Man commented that Essex Business School used a pie-chart feedback system which worked well; however it was noted that this probably due to the large class groups. Mr Romain advised that the Tropical Marine Biology cohort of students were given generic feedback and Dr Steinke had also provided oral feedback. It was agreed that generic feedback was a good idea and Prof Colbeck would encourage staff to provide generic feedback for their assignments.

Action: IC

ITEMS FROM STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

MSc Molecular Medicine

37/15 A number of students were unhappy with the structure of the optional module BE244-7-SP (Creating and Growing a New Business Venture) facilitated by the Essex Business School. There had been poor communication between the Module Supervisor and external lecturers; as a result it led to the group task having to be restarted unnecessarily. Miss Avramescu advised that the group work involved developing a business idea and it had been difficult to explain ideas to those students in the group that were non-scientists. Prof Reynolds explained that scientists were often expected to explain a business idea to a non-scientist and therefore it was a good practice for the MSc Biotechnology/Molecular Medicine students.
The BE244-7-SP Module had timetabling issues as some lectures clashed with the Biological Science Seminar series. Prof Colbeck explained that the Essex Business School timetabled the lectures which made it difficult for those students undertaking the module from multiple schools. He advised that in future the School would look at the draft timetable to avoid any potential timetable clashes. Prof Reynolds advised that he and Dr Zwacka would be meeting with the Module Supervisor to raise the issues. Miss Avramescu was asked to send Prof Reynolds a list of the issues from the Molecular Medicine students and he would report the outcome of the meeting.

**Action: CRey, RZ**

Miss Avramescu raised that the BS318-7-SP (Medical Microbiology) Essay title had been confusing for the students. She advised that the Module Supervisor had provided an outline and guidance on what students should write about, however it had been very vague. Prof Colbeck agreed to raise the issue with the Module Supervisor to ensure that the clear guidance is provided to the students in future.

**Action: IC**

Miss Avramescu enquired why the oral presentation took place before the essay assignment. Prof Colbeck agreed to raise this with Dr Zwacka and would ask him to send an e-mail to the students.

**Action: IC, RZ**

**MSc Environment and Resource Management**

Mr Man enquired about the MSc Environment and Resource Management course and asked why it was in its final year and would no longer be running. Prof Colbeck explained that student recruitment was very poor and a member of staff had recently left the School whose module was integral to the MSc Environment and Resource Management course. Subsequently the School had to buy in teaching for this academic year. He advised that the course was proving difficult to timetable and the range of optional modules from other Schools was decreasing. Prof Colbeck reported that the School were looking at an alternative course which would be a Marine Biology and Environment course; however it would be aimed at Marine Biology students and would not be an interdisciplinary course.

**MSc Tropical Marine Biology**

Mr Romain advised that it would have been useful for the ‘Project speed dating’ session to have been scheduled before the end of the autumn term in order for the students to obtain ideas for their research projects. Dr Steinke confirmed that a session did take place before the end of the autumn term; however it had been difficult to timetable a session for staff members to attend. He advised that another session took place in early January to introduce the project areas and in future he would timetable the session for the end of the autumn term and ensure that members of staff could attend.

**Action: MS**

The MSc Tropical Marine Biology students would have liked the BS706 Meta Analysis assignment to have been set over the Christmas Vacation in order to have sufficient time to collect papers and obtain ideas for the research project. Dr Steinke noted the students’ comments and agreed to introduce the assignment in the autumn term; however the deadline would remain in the spring term.

**Action: MS**
44/15 The MSc Tropical Marine Biology students raised that some Module Handbooks related to the previous academic year and it would have been useful for the current Module Handbooks to have been on Moodle at the beginning of term in order that the deadline dates were accurate to plan time management more effectively. Prof Colbeck explained staff often did not update their handbooks until very late and it was not always possible for the handbooks to be available on Moodle for the beginning of term. It was agreed that it was necessary for the Module Handbooks to be produced earlier in order that they were available for the beginning of term. It was suggested that if the Module Handbook related to the previous academic year, a note would be placed on Moodle stating that it was for information only and the current handbook would appear shortly. Prof Colbeck agreed to take this forward.

**Action: IC**

45/15 The MSc Tropical Marine Biology students advised it would be useful for the marking matrix to include the weight of each criteria towards the final assignment grade. Dr Steinke reported that students received a clearer idea about the marking criteria from the briefing session.

46/15 Mr Romain advised that it would be useful for the power point slides to be available prior to the lectures in order for the students to prepare and know the topic area/name of the lecturer in advance. Dr Steinke reported that the topic area and lecturer was published in the Module Handbooks and the name of the lecturer was also provided on the timetable. He advised that some staff did not like to publish their lecture slides in advance; however he noted the students’ comments and agreed to send an email to all the teaching staff.

**Action: MS**

47/15 It was suggested that a clarification session took place for every practical-based assignment as students’ often had a number of questions following the practical session. This could be via Moodle chat, as a tutorial or lecture. Dr Steinke confirmed that this was often offered to students although there may be occasions when it did not happen. Prof Colbeck proposed that the sessions should take place using Moodle chat. Dr Steinke advised that it would be good to encourage the students to do something similar in order that they could help each other.

**Action: MS**

**DATE AMD TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

48/15 It was noted that a Summer Term meeting would take place in Week 33 providing the Student Course Representatives had items for discussion. The Student Course Representatives were asked to e-mail any items for discussion to the Postgraduate Taught Administrator by the end of Week 31. Prof Colbeck thanked the Student Course Representatives in advance for their valuable input and reminded them to include the Student Course Representative position on their Curriculum Vitae.

**Action: Student Course Representatives**