SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENT STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE
28 November 2014
DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Prof Ian Colbeck (Chair), Dr Terry McGenity, Dr Michael Steinke, Hannah Prentice (MSc Tropical Marine Biology), Oluwaseun Awonsi (MSc Biotechnology)

In attendance: Miss Nicola Andrews

Apologies: Clare Birch, Dr Paul Bromley, Dr Gavin Sandercock, Clare Rumsey, (MSc Tropical Marine Biology), Veronika Tsizin (MSc Environment Resource Management)

MINUTES

01/14 The minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2014 were approved as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

14/13 Additional Coursework Guidance for Biotechnology Optional Modules

Dr McGenity confirmed that the MSc Biotechnology Course had been re-modelled for the 2014/15 academic year.

26/13 Information on MSc Biotechnology/Molecular Medicine Project Areas

Full written instructions would be provided to students’ regarding the MSc project areas available.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF COURSES (ARC) 2013/14

02/14 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 2nd February 2015 and Miss Andrews would circulate a copy of the ARC to the Student Course Representatives at the end of January for information.

Action: NA, Student Course Representatives

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT – MSc TROPICAL MARINE BIOLOGY

03/14 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.
04/14 The External Examiner Report for the MSc Tropical Marine Biology Course was noted by the Committee. There were no issues to address and the comments about the course had been positive. The MSc Cardiac Rehabilitation, Masters in Environmental Governance, MSc Biotechnology and MSc Molecular Medicine reports had yet to be submitted and these would be brought to the Spring Term meeting.

**Action: NA**

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**RESULTS OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF MODULES AND TEACHING – 2013/14**

05/14 The results of SAMT for 2013-14 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. He advised that the SAMT questionnaires would be circulated in the lectures and the Student Course Representatives were asked to encourage their peers to complete the SAMT forms as they were important for the School to obtain feedback about the modules.

**Action: Student Course Representatives**

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

06/14 The MSc Tropical Marine Biology students had not received any feedback on their assignments as the deadlines had been set at the end of the autumn term.

07/14 The MSc Biotechnology Student Course Representative confirmed that the students’ were happy with the level of feedback.

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

08/14 The Student Course Representatives confirmed that they found Moodle and the Listen Again facility useful. Miss Prentice reported that the Listen Again facility was not available in the PC Labs located underneath the Student Union and advised that it would have been useful for the statistics lectures in BS708 (Professional Skills in Tropical Marine Biology). Dr Michael Steinke agreed to contact LLT to look into the issue.

**Action: MS**

09/14 The Student Course Representatives had found the MSc Course Handbooks useful and liked that they were available on Moodle for the start of the autumn term.

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**OPERATION OF PGT SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS**

10/14 Prof Colbeck enquired whether the students’ would find it useful to have a mentor. Miss Prentice commented that she would prefer an informal arrangement and felt it would have been useful to have had a mentor before she started the MSc Course. She advised that the Facebook page for MSc Tropical Marine Biology students’ had been useful, but would have liked it to have been available earlier in the summer. Dr Steinke noted her comments and agreed to have the page available for students’ to access from July onwards.

**Action: MS**
11/14 Prof Colbeck reported that other Universities had a Skype conversation with students’ before they started the course in order for the students’ to ask general questions, information about the course and the books required. He advised that this was something he would be looking into in his role as Associate Dean. It was thought that Facebook pages should be available for all MSc Courses and the possibility of employing a front runner to set up the pages on behalf of the MSc Course Directors was considered. Prof Colbeck agreed to look into this and raise it at the University PGT Meeting.

**Action: IC**

**ITEMS FROM STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

**MSc Biotechnology**

12/14 The MSc Biotechnology students had expressed concern over the frequency of assignments in BS934 (Gene Technology and Synthetic Biology) and felt that the deadlines were set to closely together. Dr McGenity explained that the coursework assignments were designed to prepare students’ for the next practical session and the Module Supervisor had tried to spread the deadlines as evenly as possible. He advised that the module contained a brand new practical series and he would be reluctant to change the way in which the students’ were assessed. Miss Andrews was asked to provide Dr McGenity with a list of the deadlines and the return dates for him to look into and discuss with the Module Supervisor with a view to spreading out the deadlines in future.

**Action: NA, TMcG**

13/14 Some MSc Biotechnology students’ were uncomfortable with the return of the BS934 pre-practical tests and assignments to the student pigeon holes and felt that there should be a confidential system in place. Dr McGenity explained that the majority of the coursework marks and feedback would be returned to students via FASer. It was agreed that in future Miss Andrews would fold and staple the BS934 pre-practical tests and return them to the student pigeon holes. Students’ could also submit an envelope for the return of their assignments if they were worried about the visibility of their marks.

**Action: NA**

**MSc Tropical Marine Biology**

14/14 The majority of MSc Tropical Marine Biology students’ commented that there was often only one week between the deadlines being set and the submission of the coursework assignments. Miss Prentice also raised that the students’ were only given two week’s notice for larger pieces of assessment. Dr Steinke advised that one deadline per week was achievable, however he would ensure that information for larger pieces of assessment would be provided earlier in future.

**Action: MS**
15/14 The students’ would have appreciated more notice of the medical required for the BS705 (Tropical Marine Resources) Indonesian Field Trip to ensure that all medicals were booked in before the deadline. Miss Prentice advised that the students’ were given approximately two week’s notice prior to the deadline and students’ experienced difficulties registering with the Health Centre and booking the medical in time. Dr Steinke would speak to Professor Smith to ensure that the information was provided at the Welcome meeting and in the MSc Course Handbook.

| Action: MS |

16/14 There appeared be to a lack of communication between lecturers teaching statistics in BS708 (Professional Skills in Tropical Marine Biology). The lecturers appeared to be confused about what the students’ had already covered in the lectures which resulted in the sessions taking much longer and some incomplete sessions. The students’ advised that whilst the lecturers had been helpful, it would have been useful for the lecturers to have met each other in advance of the lectures and talked about what they had already covered. Dr Steinke advised that last year’s cohort of students’ had asked for more R to be covered in the statistics lectures and he had asked Dr Low-Decarie and Dr Dumbrell to provide some workshops as he thought it would give students’ a wider scope and appreciation of the software. In view of the comments he agreed to change it next academic year.

| Action: MS |

17/14 Miss Prentice reported that some students’ had struggled with their assignments and required extra help outside of the lectures. She commented that Dr Lawson, Dr Dumbrell and Dr Low-Decarie had spent a great deal of time with them and were very helpful. The students’ thought this was fantastic and were pleased that they could approach lecturers and receive such a good response. Dr Steinke would forward the comments to the academic staff concerned.

| Action: MS |

18/14 Some students’ thought that it would be useful to hold lectures across one or two days a week rather than one hour blocks spread across the week. A number of students’ commute onto campus and felt that it disrupted their personal time and independent learning. Dr Steinke explained that the School had very little control over the timetable and it would be difficult in terms of lecturer and room availability particularly as the majority of staff teach on both Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses. He advised that the possibility of block teaching had been discussed and there were benefits to this, however the timetable could not be changed due to technical reasons.

19/14 Miss Prentice advised that the students’ were finding it difficult to gauge how well they were performing as they had not received any marked coursework. She explained that the students’ were understanding of the industrial action and extremely supportive but some felt let down as they were paying tuition fees for the University and staff services which included marking. Dr Steinke advised that the industrial action had delayed the marking of some assessment and the students’ would have received their first set of marks by mid November. He agreed to look into setting some minor review sheets early in the autumn term to provide students’ with feedback at an earlier stage.

| Action: MS |

20/14 The majority of students’ thought that the BS707 (Methods in Tropical Marine Biology) physiology practical was not structured well. Miss Prentice explained that the students’ did not have much teaching associated to the practical and they had not covered photosynthesis. Dr Steinke advised that he had put the practical first in the series as last year’s cohort of students’ had done really well with the practical.
He explained that there had been a seminar two weeks prior to the practical and he had hoped that this would help with the session. He agreed to speak to Dr Lawson about the timing of the practical and would examine the timetable again to ensure that the students’ have photosynthesis background knowledge prior to the practical.

Action: MS

21/14 Miss Prentice commented that she liked the idea of pre-practical tests prior to undertaking a practical session. Dr Steinke agreed to consider the possibility of implementing similar pre-practical tests to those used in BS934 (Gene Technology and Synthetic Biology) for his BS707 (Methods in Tropical Marine Biology) practical.

Action: MS

NOMINATION OF SSLC REPRESENTATIVE TO ATTEND SCHOOL MEETING

22/14 The Student Course Representatives were asked to nominate a fellow representative to attend the School Meetings and Miss Prentice confirmed that she would be happy to attend the Spring and Summer Term meetings.

Action: HP

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

23/14 Mr Awonsi commented that the BS934 (Gene Technology and Synthetic Biology) pre-practical tests had been extremely useful as they helped students’ understand what they were about to do in the practical sessions.

24/14 Prof Mullineaux provided the students’ with generic feedback for the first BS934 assignment which they had liked and found useful.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

25/14 The next meeting would take place during Week 24 of the Spring Term, and would be scheduled by Miss Andrews.

Action: NA