

Unconfirmed minutes of a meeting of the Part IB Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Consultative Committee held on Friday, 3 December 2010 at 11.00 am in Meeting Room A, Sanger Building

Present: Dr F Hollfelder, Professor C J Howe and Dr J Mata

Student Representatives: N Bazin Lopez
G Chen
A Morgunov
J Reinert
J Wang
K Wiles

Course Convenor (Chairman): Dr T R Hesketh

The Chairman welcomed the representatives to the first meeting of the year. He emphasized that the main purpose of the meeting was for the students to express their views on the course.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Professor T L Blundell and Professor J O Thomas.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on Friday, 12 March 2010 were approved as a correct record.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

The Chairman reported that he had acted on all the points raised at the last meeting.

4. Michaelmas Term Lectures (Professor C J Howe, Professor J O Thomas, Dr J Mata, Professor T L Blundell and Dr F Hollfelder)

The Chairman asked the student representatives for their comments and feedback on the Michaelmas Term lectures. He informed the students that the questionnaires were still running and would be circulated before the next meeting.

The students reported that many students had found it difficult to see the writing on the board during Dr Mata's lectures. TRH said that this was probably a lighting problem and stressed that it was up to the students to point this out to the lecturer. Dr Mata said that he had asked the students at the beginning of his lectures if they could see the board and nobody had complained.

A discussion took place about the different styles used for lecture handouts. TRH said it was not possible to get all lecturers to follow a particular style and in fact some lecturers were of the opinion that no handouts should be provided. The students asked if handouts could be uploaded onto the CamTools site in advance of the lectures and if possible at the beginning of the course. TRH said that it was not possible for lecturers to make their handouts available too far in advance because they often had to make last minute changes, but he would inform them of the request made by the students. CJH suggested that it might be possible to give the students access to the previous year's CamTools site, so they could view last year's lecture material in advance of the lectures. The students said that this would be helpful. TRH agreed that this was a good suggestion.

ACTION: TRH

The timing of lectures was raised. Some lectures had overrun because the lecturer had delayed the start to allow for late students. The students said they liked FH's approach of giving a short summary at the beginning of his lecture. Students arriving late did not, therefore, miss the start of the lecture.

It was generally felt that the Michaelmas Term lectures were good. TRH said he would relay this to the lecturers.

5. **Practicals**

Students reported that there had been problems in some practicals because students with different chemistry backgrounds had been grouped together. TRH explained that there had been a change of Laboratory Leader this year and grouping students with similar backgrounds had been overlooked. He encouraged the students to participate more and to ask questions if they did not understand a particular topic. Students with similar backgrounds would be grouped together in the Lent Term.

Poor attendance at practicals was highlighted. The students felt that if the practicals were examined more students would attend. TRH said this was also a problem with the Journal Clubs. He pointed out, however, that both aspects of the course would be examined indirectly.

The problem of students having to leave practicals to attend lectures was raised. The students felt this was unfair not only to the student who had to leave, but also to their partner. TRH said this was a running problem and the price that had to be paid for the choice given to IB students at Cambridge. Possible time changes were discussed, but it was felt that changing the time would cause even more problems. The lack of space and financial restraints meant that doing practicals in pairs was the only option available at the moment.

The students reported that some students had found it difficult to find Teaching Rooms 1 and 2 and asked for the signposting within the Department to be improved.

Several points were highlighted in connection with the Bioinformatics practical. Some students had not found the practical useful at all and others had felt that too much time had been spent explaining scripting. TRH stressed that it was important that the students understood computational methods.

6. **Journal Club**

The students said it had been unclear from the handout how much preparation was needed for the Journal Club. Most people had found the Journal Clubs interesting and helpful.

7. **Questionnaires**

The students requested that comment boxes should be reintroduced to the questionnaires. TRH said this would be done for the Lent Term.

8. **MIT Exchange Programme 2011-2012 – advertisement and funding**

TRH reported that he had been asked by one of the students if the MIT Exchange Programme would be going ahead this year. He had also been asked if he could put them in touch with students who had previously taken part in the Programme. The University had directly funded the programme for several years, but it had now been suggested that some or all of the funding should come from Departments. The Biochemistry Department was not in a position to cover the entire costs. The students had received conflicting information about whether the programme would be going ahead. TRH suggested that any students interested in the Programme should sign up for it. He would try and find out the present situation.

ACTION: TRH

The students said it would be useful to have a talk by a student who had previously been on the MIT programme. TRH said it might be possible to arrange a short talk.

9. **Any other business**

There was no other business.

10. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would be held at 11.00 am on Friday, 18 March 2011 in Meeting Room A, Sanger Building.