

**Unconfirmed minutes of a meeting of the Part IB Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Consultative Committee held on Friday, 13 March 2009 at 11.00 am in Meeting Room A, Sanger Building**

**Present:** Professor K M Brindle and Ms N Bowers

**Student Representatives:** M Lercher  
B Milholland  
S Mo  
R Murphy  
S Zhang

**Course Convenor  
(Chairman):** Dr T R Hesketh

**1. Apologies for Absence:**

TRH explained that there was a Staff Meeting scheduled for the same time as the present meeting and apologised that this would prevent some staff members from attending.

Apologies for absence were received from Dr C O’Kane, Dr M Carrington, Dr R W Farndale, Dr H R Mott, P Ackermann and A Kowalski.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday, 3 December 2008 were approved as a correct record.

**3. Matters arising from the last meeting**

**Questionnaires.** The Chairman reported that the comment boxes had not been reinstated in the questionnaires because it had been decided by the Director of Teaching that they should be removed from all questionnaires relating to Biochemistry courses. The reason behind this was that it was not possible to remove the comments before general circulation. He reminded students that they still had the facility to email their comments to the Teaching Secretary.

**4. Lent Term Lectures (Dr G C Brown, Professor K M Brindle, Professor R W Farndale, Dr M Carrington and Dr T R Hesketh)**

The Chairman asked the student representatives for their comments and feedback on the Lent Term lectures.

**Dr G C Brown.** Some of the students felt that the chemistry content in the first two lectures was too high. Other students disagreed and thought it was important that this was covered. The Chairman explained that there were different requirements among the students and it was difficult to get the balance right. He said the nature of the Cambridge system meant that lecturers were always talking to mixed audiences, but he thought the content of this lecture series was about right. He would, however, look at the questionnaire feedback when it was available and see if this had proved a problem for a large number of students.  
**ACTION: TRH**

The students said that Dr Brown had run over on most of his lectures and one lecture went over by 10 minutes. The Chairman said that this should not happen in IB and he would have a quiet word with Dr Brown to make sure it did not happen again.

**ACTION: TRH**

**Professor K M Brindle.** The comments on Professor Brindle’s lectures were very positive with everyone enjoying the lectures.

**Professor R W Farndale.** The students reported that there had been difficulties with the microphone system in most of Dr Farndale's lectures. The Chairman said that he was aware of this problem as it had also happened in his lectures. He would bring this problem to the attention of Mr Green in the Photography and Graphs Department.

**ACTION: TRH**

**Dr M Carrington.** The students reported that they had received complaints about the format of Dr Carrington's handouts. There had been two separate handouts, one containing slides and the other lecture notes. Dr Carrington had requested that they write their own notes rather than relying on the lecture handout, but some students did not have enough space to do this. They suggested that more space should be given on the handout for this purpose. The Chairman said that the lecturers all had different approaches and it was not possible to make them all follow the same format. Drs Hesketh and Brindle, for example, provided very comprehensive handouts, other lectures asked students to write their own notes. The students said that they preferred to have a comprehensive handout, but liked to have a few guiding questions at the beginning of the lecture.

**Dr T R Hesketh.** One of the students asked Dr Hesketh if it would be possible to have an additional slide in his last lecture handout. TRH agreed to do this. The students said that there were some differences between the slides and the handout. TRH said he would investigate this.

**ACTION: TRH**

The students said they found it very helpful to have handouts published on the CamTools site before the beginning of the lectures. The Chairman said that some members of staff did not like to do this. However, he would continue to encourage lecturers to publish them before the lectures. KMB asked whether it was possible to keep the previous year's material on the CamTools site. CTT said that this was possible, but all new students would have to be registered for that site.

## 5. **Practicals**

The students commented that no result had been achieved during the first cell signalling practical, but they had been told this would be the case. NB said that it had not been fully appreciated how little would be seen until the practical had been carried out on the first day and it was too late to change anything at that stage. She informed the students that there was a plan in place to change the detection method and visualising blocks.

The students complained that in the metabolic control practical they were only required to copy and paste and did not get anything out of it. KMB said that he had worked on this practical 5 or 6 years ago and it had replaced a wet practical which did not work and was extremely expensive. He said the practical should give a clear result and explained what results should have been achieved. The students commented that they did not have enough time to finish the practical as the demonstrators spent a lot of time giving them instructions. They requested more time and less interference from the demonstrators. They also complained that half the class had been using Excel 2003 and the other half the new Excel. The demonstrators had had the new version and did not know how to use it. Although slides were shown at the end of the practical, the students would like to have an introduction showing the steps that needed to be taken. KMB suggested that perhaps a summary would be helpful. He said he would look into making some changes to the practical.

**ACTION: KMB**

The students commented that in general the demonstrators were very good and helpful.

## 6. **Journal Club**

The students said that they found the paper discussed at the second Journal Club too long and boring. They had not been familiar with some of the terminology. KMB said this was good training. The Chairman said that the idea was to introduce the students to genuine research papers and to instruct them on how to start analysing them, but that it was

difficult to find the perfect paper. He said that if nothing else, this exercise showed that bad papers were published in good journals and this had been a good lesson to learn. The Chairman would look at the material again to see if improvements could be made to the introduction page. **ACTION: TRH**

The students agreed that one Journal Club a term was about the right balance..

## **7. Any Other Business**

TRH asked the students if they had any comments regarding direct overlap or repetition between the BMB course and, for example, CDB. He said that every effort was made to monitor the courses and to make sure that there was not a problem. The students said they were not aware of any direct overlap.

The students raised the point that the feedback scores for the Michaelmas Term computer practical were particularly low in terms of positive feedback. They commented that they did not have any information about the practical in advance and had spent most of the time reading through the notes. The Chairman said that this was a new practical which probably accounted for some of the problems. He said that the practical was not easy to design, but covered essential material. He would keep these problems in mind so that improvements could be made to the practical next year. **ACTION: TRH**

## **8. Date of next meeting**

The Chairman informed the meeting that there would be no meeting in the Easter Term. The students could, however, make any comments through the questionnaires or directly to the Chairman via the Teaching Secretary.

The Chairman thanked the student representatives for being very constructive and helpful throughout the year.