

Meeting 1/10

15 April 2010

For general publication

Present: Mr Akash Boda, Mr Adrian English, Ms Melissa Fenwick, Miss Katelin Haynes (in the chair from Item 3), Ms Kekini Kuppan, Mr Alexander Metcalf, Mr David Mogg, Dr Steve Reid, Miss Nicole Silajew, Mr Mark Starkey (in the chair until Item 3, minutes), Ms Prahatha Venkatraman, Dr Simon Worrall (up to and including Item 4.2).

ACTION

Apologies: Assoc Prof Melissa Brown, Prof Alastair McEwan, Assoc Prof Joe Rothnagel. Dr Worrall needed to leave before the meeting concluded, to attend to a mid-semester exam.

Welcome: New members were welcomed to the Committee and continuing members welcomed back.

1. Terms of Reference and Membership:

Members were referred to the terms of reference and mode of operation of the Committee and its membership for 2010, as set out in the agenda papers (and viewable on the School's website). Mark Starkey spoke to the papers and encouraged members to participate actively in meetings. He pointed out that minutes of the 2009 meetings were on the School website and would give new members an idea of the activities to-date of the Committee.

2. Election of Chairperson and Provision of Secretarial Support:

It had been foreshadowed in the agenda papers, circulated ahead of the meeting, that the Committee's chairperson be elected from the student members. Following a call for nominations in the meeting, Katelin Haynes was elected unopposed.

It was agreed that Mark Starkey continue to provide secretarial support to the Committee.

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held 13 October 2009:

The minutes, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

4. Business arising out of the minutes:

4.1 Assessment Practices

It had been reported to the October 2009 meeting that the School's Assessment Subcommittee would look at the School's offerings in 2010 for both semesters and consult with course coordinators on reducing assessment tasks and, where possible, limiting the amount of assessment due in the last two weeks of semester.

Prior to the current meeting, Joe Rothnagel had reported to Mark Starkey that a request to course coordinators to consider reducing the amount of assessment had been made and had been monitored by the School's Discipline Chief Examiners when they had approved each Course Profile for publication at the start of first semester. Joe understood that the only significant adjustment made had been to BIOC2000. Course coordinators had also been asked to avoid assessment tasks in the final two weeks of semester where possible.

Alex Metcalf reported that he was enrolled in BIOC3000 this semester and the assessment load in that course seemed reasonable. He added that the assessment for third year molecular biosciences courses in general was well-spaced.

Simon Worrall said that he believed the iMark system could produce a consolidated report of when assessment was due across a range of courses. Mark suggested that it might be possible to check assessment due dates for certain common combinations of courses (or at least the compulsory courses in a given year of a given program). He undertook to investigate and report back to the next meeting.

Mark

Steve Reid asked if students found mid-semester examinations useful. The student members responded that such exams were useful in giving feedback on progress in the course, provided the material was not re-examined in the end-of-semester exam. The feedback benefits were seen to be of most use to first year students in their first semester (as had been discussed in the Committee in 2009). Steve responded that it was useful to know if students valued mid-semester exams, given that some staff were not so fond of them in that there were practical difficulties in holding the exams in class time due to the lack of venues required to achieve proper invigilation standards.

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4. Business arising out of the minutes: (cont'd)

4.2 Development of a stronger cohort experience for students taking the BSc

Further to the discussion at the October 2009 meeting to run BBQs for second year students to help them get to know others taking their majors and the lecturing staff involved in teaching the major, Alex Metcalf, working through the Science Undergraduate Students Society (SUSS), had organised a BBQ for second year MBS major students for Week 4 of the current semester. The School had provided support in terms of the cost of food and drink for the first event (the idea being that students pay a gold coin to help fund future events), an email to all third year MBS students seeking volunteers to run the BBQ, an email to relevant staff, and the printing of colour posters. One thing that had been overlooked was an email to second year MBS students!

Unfortunately, only ~15 students had attended. Three of the 9 staff invited had attended. None-the-less, the students and staff had interacted as intended.

Alex and Mark Starkey debriefed after the event and the following ideas for boosting attendance at future events had been proposed:

- email invitations to target students (but be aware of UQ's Bulk Messaging policy);
- longer lead time for promoting event;
- more-visible location, eg, Radon Court;
- include third years?

Alex spoke to a paper he had written, included in the agenda papers, addressing the outcomes of the Week 4 BBQ and further ideas for future BBQs. He proposed:

- that, given numbers, the BBQ for second year Chemistry and Biotechnology majors be a combined event, and that it be held early in second semester;
- Biotechnology Field of Study coordinators be contacted for suggestions to help the event succeed;
- that student members of the Coursework Students Consultative Committee consider taking up one of the two helper roles, the duties of which were set out in Alex's paper.

Student
members

Steve Reid suggested another idea, of having one BBQ early in the academic year for all second year SCMB majors, with a short presentation on opportunities in each of the four significant discipline areas (Biochemistry, Biotechnology, Chemistry, Microbiology) by a staff member. Following the formal part of the event, students could mix with the individual major convenors to get details of particular majors.

Melissa Fenwick suggested that some students would be turned off by an event that had a marketing angle to it. Steve replied that he was suggesting an information component that might attract more staff and students to the event, the social component of which was designed to enhance the sense of community amongst students embarking on a particular major.

The venue for such an event would need to be considered. The Chemistry Podium might be suitable if the new landscaped space between the Chemistry & Priestley Buildings was available for the BBQ.

It was agreed that Steve's idea be given further consideration for 2011, for discussion at the next or a future meeting.

All
members

4.3 Identification of career paths for BSc students – credit for industry placements

Prior to the meeting, Joe Rothnagel had reported to Mark Starkey that he had discussed with the Faculty the idea that SCIE3044, *Vacation Project*, offered over the summer semester, might be made flexible enough to allow industry projects (with a UQ supervisor), additional to in-house research projects, to be undertaken by students.

Mark reported that the outcome was that students could be advised to enrol in a BIOT course because the course had established a framework for assisting students who seek an industry placement, albeit in the field of biotechnology. Mark was unsure which BIOT course was being referred to, but though it might be BIOT4039, *Biotechnology Project B*, the description of which was "Individual laboratory research project undertaken either within the university or in an industry setting."

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4. Business arising out of the minutes: (cont'd)

4.3 Identification of career paths for BSc students – credit for industry placements (cont'd)

BIOT4039 is available to BSc students as an elective. The assumed background for the course is “appropriate courses at third year level and good written and communication skills.” It is a 2 unit course offered each semester, so a student could complete it in the final semester of the BSc.

Members felt that it would be confusing to students to enrol in a fourth level Biotechnology course with ‘Biotechnology’ in the title, if one was undertaking an industry project in Chemistry, for example. It seemed more sensible for there to be a generic SCIE coded course. Mark undertook to convey this sentiment to Joe.

Mark, Joe

Steve added that such a course could follow a similar format to the BIOT course – industry placement assessed via a final written report. He felt that offering the course over the summer semester would probably be more practical in terms of students attending an industry location off-campus without having to juggle this attendance with class commitments for other courses. This suggested that the original proposal for adapting SCIE3044 might be reconsidered.

Members were advised that the sourcing of student placements remained a student responsibility because no dedicated resources for linking students with placements existed in the School or Faculty. Ross Barnard, who was on sabbatical leave this semester, had emailed Mark ahead of the meeting to say that he had been active in moving to formalise industry placements in the Biotechnology program and that new SCMB academic staff member, Dr Vito Ferro, would be coordinating industry placements for that program in future.

4.4 Student Company Programs

Mark Starkey reported that Ross Barnard had advised by email that he had met with the Director of Young Achievers Australia, as foreshadowed in the minutes of the October 2009 meeting. Ross had reported that, unfortunately, Young Achievers Australia had ceased operating.

5. First Year Courses SCIE1000, STAT1201 and MATH1051:

First-year BBiotech representative, Akash Boda, observed that a number of students appeared to be experiencing difficulty with SCIE1000. The course covered a wide range of the sciences, from computer science to physics to biology. Some assessment tasks seemed to students to require a lot of work for a small percentage of marks. First Year BSc representative, Nicole Silajew, agreed that the course was likely to attract criticism because of its high maths content, and that the value of some assessment items seemed low for the effort required.

Akash noted also that STAT1201 and MATH1051 required only one hour of practical attendance, but some students felt that they would benefit from more such contact. Other members pointed out that students were free to attend additional prac sessions in the courses, but Akash said that it was difficult to get into the sessions because they were full.

Steve Reid said that the idea of SCIE1000 was to provide students with an integrated view of Science. He added that most modern science required reasonable quantitative skills, which was why maths was a component of first year Science programs.

Although the School of Chemistry & Molecular Biosciences did not have direct control over the courses discussed, the feedback would be communicated to the Faculty's Associate Dean (Academic). Students were also encouraged to provide feedback via the course and teaching evaluation surveys they would have access to later in the semester. The results of these surveys were taken seriously by the academic staff responsible for course coordination and curriculum review, and there was an increasing culture in the University for the results to be acted on and reported back to students (eg, via the course profile).

Mark

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6. BIOC3000, *Biomolecular Structure & Function*:

Katelin Haynes and David Mogg said that they had been surprised to discover that this new capstone course had only two wet practicals. They felt that there was a need to deliver more biochemistry practical skills. They reported that the other practical work in the course focussed on bioinformatics and visualisation.

Steve Reid observed that bioinformatics was becoming increasingly important and that bench skills were something that could be developed through application, such as via further research studies or in the workplace.

Mark undertook to pass the query on to the course coordinator and major convenor for comment and report-back to the Committee.

Mark

7. Participation of the wider student body:

The student members of the Committee reported that, despite an email having gone out to all students enrolled in the School's courses, none of them had been contacted yet by constituents expressing concerns. Mark mentioned that, in line with usual practice, when the minutes of this meeting were published, an email would go to all students pointing them to the minutes and inviting them to contact their representatives ahead of the next meeting, if they had matters to raise.

Student members suggested that course coordinators, especially of the larger courses, be requested to put a slide up in lectures regarding the existence of the consultative committee, its role, and how to contact the student representatives. Mark undertook to prepare a slide, to be circulated to members for comment. Once it was finalised, it would be sent to course coordinators, who would be free to decide whether they displayed it.

Mark

8. Next meeting:

At least one more meeting would be held this semester, around Week 10 or 11, unless pressing business arose in the meantime. Mark would advise members of the date and venue.

Mark

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