Present: Miss Nicole Silajew (in the chair at the request of Akash Boda), Mr Akash Boda, Prof Melissa Brown, Ms Noor Dashti, Mr Patrick Fortuna, Mr Kevin Hunault, Ms Jennifer Keller, Assoc Prof Joe Rothnagel, Mr Mark Starkey, Ms Flor Del Milagro Vasquez Sotomayor, Miss Ellie Van Der List.

Apology: Mr Adrian English.

Minutes: The minutes of the meeting held 30 August 2011, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

1. Majors Information Session and Academic Advising Demand:

Mark Starkey reported that the Faculty of Science Engagement Office had delayed producing posters, flyers and slides to advertise that the Careers that Started in Science booklet is available online until a revised edition, currently in production, was released. The existing version contained content which needed to be deleted because one of the graduates profiled had withdrawn permission for their profile to be included. Mark would follow up.

Members noted that the School had held a Majors Information Fair on the Chemistry Podium on 7 September. Student attendance had not been high – approximately forty undergraduate students had attended. University policy on emailing students had meant that an email was not permitted to be sent to all BSc students, because not all BSc majors were represented at the Fair. An email had gone to all students enrolled in second semester offerings of first year Chemistry courses.

Notwithstanding good attendance from majors convenors and student consultative committee members, the School’s Engagement Committee had decided that the event need not be repeated in 2012.

Mark Starkey noted that the Faculty had run a majors information event in 2008 but had discontinued it due to poor attendances. It was anecdotally believed that demand for such an event had diminished as the BSc curriculum had settled down since its progressive overhaul commencing in 2008, and that students generally were receiving adequate information about majors from the Faculty website, publications such as Careers that started in Science, course experiences, and academic advising sessions offered by the Faculty.

Melissa Brown asked members how students chose their majors and elective courses and whether more could be done to assist them. Flor Vasquez Sotomayor responded that she had used the web and spoken to academic advisors. Kevin Hunault said that he had used the Faculty of Science course planner website and other members agreed that this was a useful resource.

Melissa said she had received some informal feedback from a couple of students that they thought they had been locked in to doing particular courses, when this was not the case. Ellie Van Der List said that prerequisites were sometimes unclear – she had missed taking BIOL1020 in the semester that would have been best for the course sequence in her program.

Flor noted that for postgraduate coursework entry there was some latitude in the prerequisites for entry and suggested that it would be useful to prospective students to see examples of the kind of backgrounds that were appropriate. Melissa responded that it was difficult to be prescriptive in published material as there are many combinations and permutations that could be regarded as equivalent to the minimum entry standards. Flor suggested that a button marked as ‘click here to contact an academic advisor’ could be useful in these circumstances. Mark undertook to investigate.

Akash Boda said that a course planner tailored to each student that showed what of the program requirements had been completed and what remained would be useful. Mark responded that he understood that the University had been planning for some time to introduce such a ‘degree audit’ function to SI-Net. (Subsequent to the meeting, Mark checked with the SI-Net development team in Central Administration. An ‘academic advisement’ module was rolled out to the faculty offices a couple of years ago, to assist them with graduation eligibility checking. The system requires a lot of manual input to keep up with program rule changes, and the Faculty of Science, like a number of other Faculties with programs with a lot of student choice, has found that it does not have sufficient staffing stability to keep up. Ultimately, the University would like to extend the module to student use, but this is seen to be a long-term objective.)
2. **Student Cohort Experiences:**

At the 30 August 2011 meeting, members had been invited to ask their constituents if there were any improvements that could be made to the Chemistry Podium space that would make it more usable to students for self-directed learning and collaboration.

Members reiterated that students generally liked the Podium as it is, but that it would be good for third and four year undergraduates and Honours students to have a room like that on Level 1 of the Priestley Building used by Maths & Physics students. It would have computers, lounge furniture and tea/coffee facilities. Ideally, one room would be in the Chemistry Building and one in the MBS Building. Melissa Brown said that there was a reasonable chance that such rooms would eventuate as space was refurbished. The School was presently pursuing funds for refurbishments and wanted to provide such rooms. She thanked students for confirming demand for such space and suggesting the kind of fitout.

Joe Rothnagel reported that the School Executive Committee had recently suggested that something similar to the annual Biotechnology students’ weekend trip to the University’s Moreton Bay Research Station on Stradbroke Island be investigated for offering to BSc students entering the third year of SCMB-administered majors.

Research on the costs, possible numbers and preparatory work involved had been undertaken and would be considered by the Teaching & Learning Committee at its 6 December meeting. Joe and Mark would report to a subsequent Consultative Committee meeting.

3. **Postgraduate Student Printing/Copying Quota:**

Flor Vasquez Sotomayor said that students appreciated being given a 200 page black-and-white print quota by the School but wondered if it was possible to add a small colour quota or to be able to convert some of the B&W quota to colour. Sometimes students needed to include a colour page of a graphic in an assignment submission and had to print that page elsewhere.

Mark Starkey responded that he would investigate options and make a recommendation to the Head of School.

4. **Undergraduate Research Courses:**

Mark Starkey reported that, further to the 30 August 2011 meeting, the School’s Engagement Officer had added to her work list the production of a screen slide and/or poster for the Chemistry Podium and the Level 2 foyer of Building 76 and a feature on the SCMB homepage to promote these courses. The promotional items will be in place ahead of the enrolment deadlines for first semester 2012.

5. **Publicising the Student Consultative Committee:**

Akash Boda reported that he had followed up the suggestion made at the 30 August 2011 meeting to ask if the Faculty’s mailing lists could be used to promote the Consultative Committee. He had been told that because the Committee was relevant only to one School, it was not appropriate to use Faculty-wide mailing lists.

A number of members confirmed that SCMB course coordinators had put up the slide promoting the Committee in lectures earlier in the semester.

6. **Group Photographs:**

Mark Starkey confirmed that the group photos of MBiotech and MMolBiol students who commenced in second semester 2011 had been finalised and electronically distributed to the students concerned. Flor Vasquez Sotomayor and Patrick Fortuna asked that the informal photographs taken of the first semester 2011 intake be similarly distributed. (This was done subsequent to the meeting.)
7. **Testimonials:**

Further to the 30 August 2011 meeting, a number of members had provided testimonials. Mark Starkey thanked them and undertook to be in contact them regarding how to get a UQ polo shirt to them.

8. **iGEM:**

The International Genetically Engineered Machine competition (iGEM) is promoted as the premiere undergraduate Synthetic Biology competition. Student teams are given a kit of biological parts from the Registry of Standard Biological Parts. Working at their own universities, they use these parts and new parts of their own design to build biological systems and operate them in living cells.

Akash Boda reported that he had recently competed in Hong Kong. He had been talking with the Head of the School of Biomedical Sciences and the Professor Susan Hamilton about having a lab at UQ dedicated to iGEM, overseen by an academic staff member. Akash hoped the School of Chemistry & Molecular Biosciences could become involved.

Patrick Fortuna said that he had competed in a previous iGEM event as part of the Danish team and would be willing to help out. Akash said that he would contact Patrick.

9. **CHEM2054 Marking Criteria and Feedback:**

Second year BSc Chemistry representative, Nicole Silajew, reported that many students had approached her in regarding difficulties they had been having with CHEM2054, Experimental Chemistry. These included:

- students would like a criteria for marking (to give them an idea of the most important elements of the report).
- students would like feedback on their reports. In particular, they wished for faster initial feedback (ie, weeks 1 & 2). Students felt that they might be making the same mistakes when they are handing in their 3rd and 4th reports without feedback.

Nicole said that, overall, many students felt that they were not preforming well in this course.

A response had been sought from the Course Coordinator, Assoc Prof Mark Riley. Mark had stated that the marking criteria was a real issue that needed addressing. He had prepared recommendations for next year that he intended to pass onto Ross McGeary who would be coordinating CHEM2054 in 2012. The options Mark had identified for the experiments were:

- that they be rewritten to be ‘standardised’ so that they are able to fit into a single broad marking scheme;
- that they be designated as being of a particular type (organic, analytical, inorganic or physical), each with separate, more-specific marking schemes.

Mark had anticipated that feedback should be more timely in future and would recommend to Ross that a one week turnaround of lab reports by tutors be sought, although he was unsure how it could be enforced.

Concerning the point "that many students feel like they're not performing well in this course", Mark had reported that the students who were struggling in the course at this stage were those that had either missed experiments or who had submitted multiple late experiments.

Mark Starkey reported by way of background that, at the 26 August 2010 meeting, the issue of the number of tutors in CHEM2054 had been raised. It had been established that the number of tutors to students was about right at 9 or 10 students per tutor, but that the level of expertise in the tutors was lacking and that the technical staff had been tutoring when they should not be (as it kept them from their other work). It had been suggested also that there was not enough equipment in the combined 2054/3016 pracs in second semester 2010, including a shortage of fume cupboards.
9. **CHEM2054 Marking Criteria and Feedback**: (cont’d)

In 2011 there were extra fume cupboards and more separation of the 2054 and 3016 pracs. An extra spectrophotometer, boiling baths and melting point apparatus had been purchased and were in use in the pracs. From 2012, CHEM2054 would be offered in first semester, while CHEM3016 stayed in second. It had been proposed for 2012 that one of the technical staff, who was retiring at the end of 2011 but was interested in ongoing part-time work, be employed as a lead tutor on these courses, bringing his considerable experience and expertise with the instrumentation and the practicals to help train other tutors.

Mark also suggested to Nicole that she encourage the CHEM2054 students to notify the course coordinator about the performance of particular tutors and to complete evaluations of the tutors which the School required be undertaken. Mark explained that the School requires tutors to lodge their student evaluation results with the School. The results, along with formal feedback about the tutors collected from course coordinators or laboratory technical staff, is used to decide on tutor reappointments or to initiate performance counselling. The results are also used to identify the top-performing tutors who receive formal recognition and a small gift.

Melissa Brown thanked Nicole for raising the matter and encouraged others to do the same where significant course matters affected a number of students.

10. **Lecture Attendances:**

Melissa Brown mentioned that she had lately been delivering a section of the BIOL2202 lectures to two streams, each meant to be about 200 students, yet only 20-30 students had been attending. Ellie Van Der List, who had been attending, said that attendances had been higher earlier in the semester, but a lot of assessment items in various courses were due at the moment. Also, Lectopia had been promoted in the course moreso than in other courses.

11. **Student Evaluations of Courses and Tutors:**

Joe Rothnagel reported that the School’s Teaching & Learning Committee had recently held a Q&A session with the head of the TEDI Evaluations Unit. Some staff had suggested that students suffered evaluation fatigue at the end of each semester and that therefore results might not be representative.

Nicole Silajew said that if she has something to say about the course, good or bad, she filled in the form; otherwise she did not. She believed the option should always be available however.

Joe asked if it would be better if the evaluations were online. Student members agreed that response rates would likely drop considerably if evaluations were only available online. Mark Starkey added that some course evaluations were done online and the response rate was generally lower. Student members said that in cases where completion of the evaluation was part of the assessment, response rates would be higher.

10. **Next Meeting and Membership:**

As this was likely to be the final meeting of the Committee for 2011, the chairperson thanked retiring members for their contributions and asked if other members were happy to continue their membership, provided they remained eligible as they moved on in their programs. Those present responded that they would like to continue if eligible. Mark said that he would be in contact with continuing members prior to the start of the academic year in 2012.

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