

A SUMMARY OF THE EFFECT OF RESTRUCTURING IN SBCS ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Based on a previous paper by B. Curran, R. Hughes, F. Missirlis and J.M.Schmid-Araya

Our concerns about the negative impacts of the restructuring on research will appear elsewhere. Here we provide evidence for what the vast majority of staff in SBCS has repeatedly pointed out, i.e. **that the present restructuring plan fails to deliver a high quality educational experience for our students.**

This is the first year that students **will be paying £9,000 fees and we have to be at the top** of our game when they arrive in September if we are to meet that challenge.

STUDENTS WILL NO LONGER RECEIVE OUR MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY – TIME

It is not a coincidence that many of the ‘at risk’ staff are the very ones that students turn to in time of need. Staff who give their time to students have less for their other activities!

Add to this that the restructuring aims to remove some tutorials to free up time and the picture becomes very clear: **The student experience will be one where students are denied the staff who are prepared to listen to them, and fewer face-to-face experiences** than is presently the case.

Finally, there will be a devastating effect **upon the pastoral care of the advisees** of each academic at risk when they have to be reallocated to a new adviser.

STUDENTS WILL NO LONGER RECEIVE A HIGH QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The planned restructuring will have **an extremely negative impact on teaching both in terms of delivery and teaching quality**, even if some of the academic staff are willing to be bought back for a considerable price.

Colleagues at ‘risk of redundancy’:

Organise 27 of the 187 modules offered by SBCS (spread over the entire spectrum of BSc, MSc programmes we offer). The total includes **11 first year modules**.

They deliver: **463 of the 2070 Lectures** (average load per person = 42.1); **460 of the 1884 Practical/workshop** classes (average load per person = 41.8) and **251 of the 1241 Tutorials** (average load per person = 22.8)

If we first consider the ‘Whole Organism Division’, we find that there are 7 colleagues at risk who contribute a total of **324** lectures. This is on average of **46.3** lectures per lecturer. What could the College do faced with this deficit?

Option 1: The school could consider allocating the load of 324 lectures to the 1-3 TSs. Even ignoring **the specialised nature of some of these lectures**, this option would constitute an unworkable number of hours for the 3 projected posts.

Option 2: The school could allocate the 324 lectures to 1-3 TSs and the 9 remaining TRs. Our assessment indicates that **this would effectively double the teaching loads of TR staff** from their current average load of **28.7** lectures to **58.5** lectures.

DESTROYING OUR FLAGSHIP

The special nature of the B990 BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES is a case to argue on its own. **This is an externally accredited programme** and as such **must not be altered without permission from the external validation panel**. There are 2 colleagues under threat who teach the entire physiology component. Without them and their expertise, this programme will be seriously at risk and unteachable. Moreover this programme attracts many of our most talented students and is one of the most popular subjects (current total of students across 3 years is 258).

EFFECT ON STUDY PROGRAMMES

Compulsory and optional modules will be affected. Figure 1 summarizes the percentage of affected modules in some of the many programmes of study.

There is a greater impact in the first year across the various programmes where on average 40% of all compulsory courses and 52.8% of optional courses are seriously affected.

The percent of all affected compulsory modules in the 2nd year decreases to 16.3% but the serious effect on optional modules remains high at 35.8%. For instance, the programmes Medical Genetics will have more than 50% of optional modules affected (Fig.1).

NEXT YEAR'S NSS IS ALSO PLACED AT RISK

In the SBCS, final year BSc students are offered the opportunity to carry out a research project in a lab of their choice. The process for allocation to a research lab considers applications by students in their second semester of their 2nd year of study and they are given the chance to be allocated to one of 5 choices. We have so far received applications to do research projects with 28 SBCS academics from 180 students. 32 of these students (17.8%) have chosen as their first choice one of the colleagues at risk.

It is likely that the department will consider reallocating these students at short notice to the remaining TSs and TRs, **but consider the effect on the NSS score** when these students and their colleagues fill out their forms next year. The affected students will at best, given limited resources (chemicals, equipment, etc) in the department and the College must consider health and safety issues (i.e. a crowded lab), be doing a project outside their main areas of interest; at worst they will be doing some sort of 'surrogate' project. What sort of a student experience will that be? and how will they and their friends score SBCS in 2013 when we are trying to recruit undergraduates charging Russell Group fees?

THE PhD STUDENT EXPERIENCE IS ALSO ADVERSELY AFFECTED

The impact on PhD students has not been taken seriously, and currently all colleagues at risk have a total of 10.5 PhD students in various stages of their postgraduate research. Some of them are funded by college grants (GTSSs) while others are funded by CSC (Chinese Scholarship Council).

We have 2 PhDs which are not in the QMUL books because these students are registered overseas in a university where our colleague is recognised as an Extraordinary Professor. These students do depend strongly on him and his unique lab facilities to complete their research. The College must take into account not only the impact on their research progress but also on their welfare.

It is fair to conclude that the impact of the restructuring on the student experience has not been subjected to a proper risk assessment. Therefore we deem it unacceptable and irresponsible.

Final note: Time is short

Even as we write colleagues are applying for jobs elsewhere, one is leaving another is considering an offer and others have been interviewed. These are good researchers that are taking their expertise and REF contributions with them. Second year students have no idea who to choose for their final year projects because nobody knows who will have left by September, and planning for field courses in summer for next year's courses can only proceed if we know who will still be here to deliver the lectures for these modules. Even if 90% of SBCS staff remains in some guise in the short term, the missing 10% constituting 6-7 individuals will have a catastrophic effect on our delivery of teaching and more especially on our ability to look after the students in 2012/13. And all of this in the very year that our recruitment is up 50% in C100 Biology and the students are paying fees.

We regret the reputation damage already inflicted on the department and the corresponding drop in morale. However, there is still time to avert disaster: we urgently need to meet together to agree a new and workable plan to achieve the laudable goals to which the College aspires.

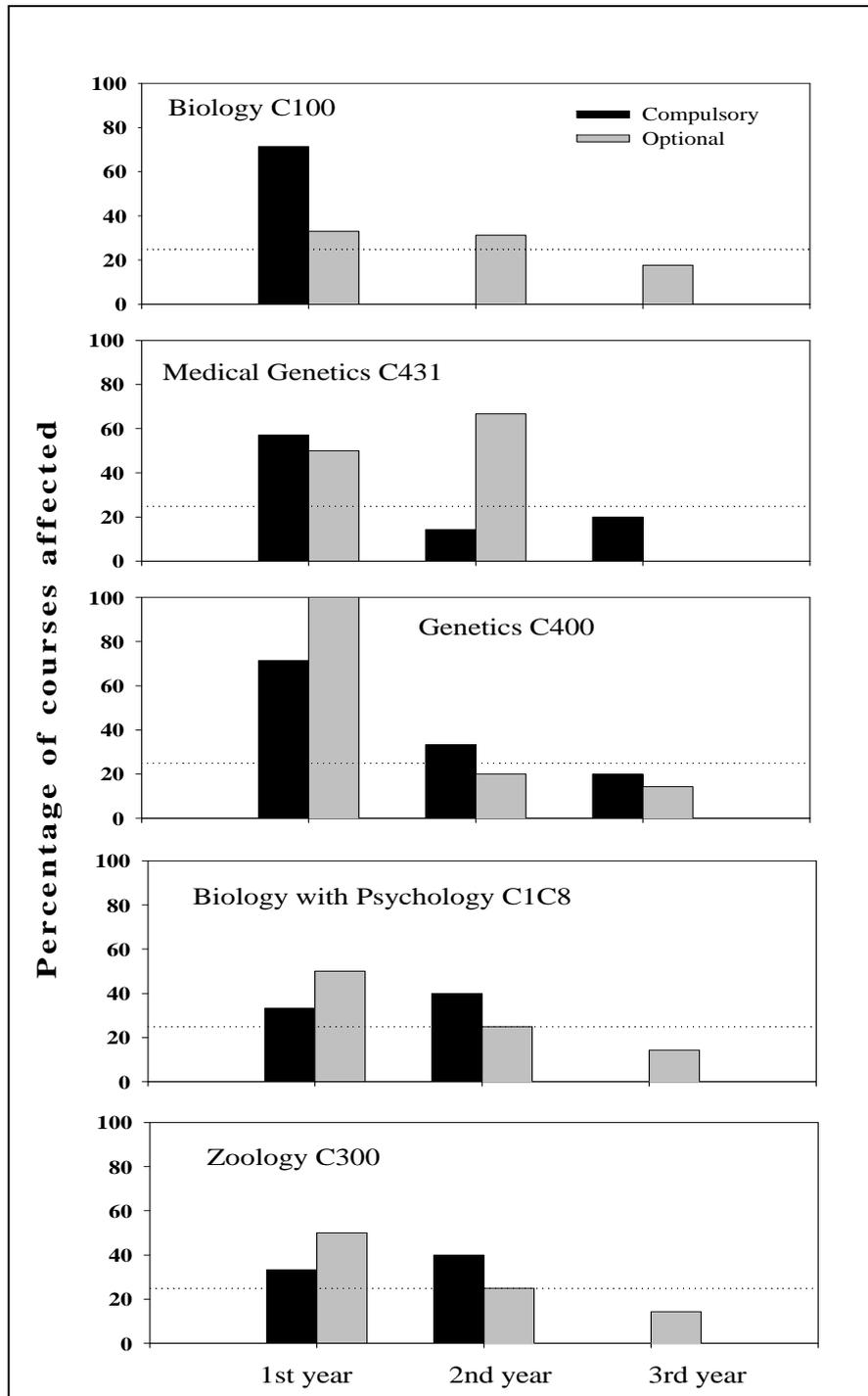


Fig. 1. The percentage of modules affected per study programme (Biology, Medical Genetics, Genetics and Biology with Psychology and Zoology) and per year of study. Dotted line represents 25%.