

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minute of the Meeting held on 11 May 2016

Present: Professor P McGeorge (Convener), Dr A Arnason, Dr T Baker, Professor B Connolly, Mr C Duncan, Professor S Davies, Mr L Fuller, Professor J Masthoff, Professor J Morrison, Professor K Shennan, Dr S Tucker, Dr B Scharlau, Professor R Wells

In attendance: Ms K Christie, Mr P Fantom, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr M Pryor, Dr R Bernard (Clerk), Miss E Hay (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Ms G Clark, Professor W Naphy

PREVENT PRESENTATION

Mr Angus Donaldson and Ms Ashley Powell were in attendance for this item.

- 1.1 Members of the Committee received a presentation (*copy filed as UCTL/110516/016*) on 'Prevent', the UK Government's strategy requiring the University to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism' and placing responsibility on them to ensure that measures are taken to meet these responsibilities. The Committee noted the presentation as delivered, specifically acknowledging the underpinning principle of the Prevent strategy to safeguard individuals from terrorist-related harm. Members of the Committee further acknowledged the challenges associated with this, particularly in balancing the principles of academic freedom with statutory duties, while safeguarding students and staff.
- 1.2 Mr Donaldson and Ms Powell assured members of the Committee that the University was working to ensure the adoption of measures under Prevent strikes an appropriate balance between academic freedom and student and staff welfare. A member of the Committee posed a question regarding the ability to 'break through' any filter in place to access websites for means of academic research. The Committee were assured that academic freedom would be protected as far as possible, however, were reminded that sites considered illegal could and would not be accessible.
- 1.3 Members of the Committee acknowledged the Student Association's views on the legislation as being geared towards marginalisation and Islamophobia. The Committee recognised the sensitivities around the issue and the potential risk of backlash if the University was to wrongly approach the legislation.
- 1.4 The Committee recognised the more stringent legislation and reporting requirements required of English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and noted that as Scotland was currently seen as 'low risk' the requirements of the University are lesser at this time.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2016

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/001)

- 2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2016 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/002)

- 3.1 Members of the Committee considered a paper seeking the views of members as to whether students should be given the opportunity, without seeking additional approval, to undertake up to 15 additional credits per half session above the normal full-time credit load of 120 credits. The Committee were informed that the issue had been considered at the recent meeting of the Heads of School, who were supportive of students undertaking an increase in credits but did not wish it to be an automatic process, instead requesting that students be asked to seek approval from their School before being permitted to do so. Members of the Committee acknowledged that 'School' in this regard referred to the School responsible for the degree programme on which the student is registered and not the School responsible for the additional course concerned.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that the Heads of School had proposed that School administrative staff be given the appropriate permissions to undertake this work (the amending of a students' curriculum) in MyCurriculum.
- 3.3 Members of the Committee noted concern as to how students in their honours years could undertake additional credits without potential impact on their degree classification and/or Grade Point Average (GPA). The Committee agreed that students in this position would be required to identify what would count towards their classification/GPA at the point of selection additional credit. The Committee were informed that courses could then be excluded from the classification/GPA calculation by way of the system, on an individual student basis.
- 3.4 The Committee discussed the reasoning behind the proposal to allow students to undertake extra credits. Members of the Committee were informed that is its often students in their early years of study who wish to take on additional credits and often for reasons of interest in extra subjects or for keeping their options for degree specification open. The Committee noted that the provision of taking extra credits was not a new one, with students having previously discussed their options for doing so with Advisers of Study.
- 3.5 Members of the Committee agreed that the proposal would increase the workload of School administrators. The Committee were informed, however, that Heads of School had unanimously requested that the system work in this manner and were made aware of the potential workload implications. Members of the Committee agreed that the proposal be trialled in academic year 2016/17 and re-examined at an appropriate point. Members of the Committee agreed that on re-examination data as to the numbers of students requesting extra credit and being permitted to undertake extra should be provided for consideration.

Action: Clerk

PROPOSAL TO INCREASE MARKING TIME

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/003)

- 4.1 The Committee considered a paper proposing a change to the academic year, specifically to accommodate an increase in marking time available in the first and second half session examination diets. Members of the Committee noted the impact this would have on the summer graduation and resit diets, postponing both by a week.

- 4.2 Members of the Committee welcomed the paper with regards to its proposals to amend the second half session marking deadline but noted concern that the amendment to the first half session would not allow students to receive their first half session exam results before the beginning of the second half session. The Committee noted that this issue was one which had been discussed at length during the change to the academic year as a whole and that embarking on the second half session without knowledge of their academic position would be detrimental.
- 4.3 In considering the first half session proposal, Members of the Committee raised concern that to keep the current return deadline would be to commit to a deadline that some Schools were unable to meet. The Committee were, however, reminded that while an External Examiner should be involved in the course design, delivery and assessment process as a whole, first half session results were provisional until such time as they had been considered by an External Examiner, often at the final exam board at the conclusion of the second half session.
- 4.4 In considering the proposal members of the Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate that the summer or second half session deadline be amended on a trial basis, with the first half session deadline remaining unchanged at this time. The Committee further agreed that Schools should be reminded of the fact provisional results could be returned. Where delays did occur, however, the Committee agreed that students should be both informed and kept updated. The Committee agreed to review the change following its first cycle.

Action: Clerk

INTRODUCTION ON ONLINE 'PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES' FOR ALL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/004)

- 5.1 The Committee noted the proposal to introduce a compulsory Professional Skills course for all undergraduate students. Members of the Committee acknowledged that this issue had previously been considered and was now returning to Committee for approval following further discussion and clarification.
- 5.2 Members of the Committee noted that the course proposed for introduction had been heavily influenced by employers, piloted within the University and was designed to take approximately 3 hours for a student to complete. Although designed to be compulsory, members of the Committee noted a change to the general regulations for undergraduate students (*UCTL/110516/013 refers*) to state that no student would in fact be prevented from graduating solely on the basis that they had not completed this course.
- 5.3 Members of the Committee noted the potential for monitoring students by means of this course, acknowledging that it may provide an additional opportunity for those considering retention to capture information on students not engaging at an early stage.
- 5.4 The Committee agreed to recommend that the course be made compulsory to the Senate.

Action: Clerk

READMISSION TO STUDY POLICY

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/005)

- 6.1 The Committee received the paper proposing a Readmission to Study Policy designed to provide guidance to staff and students regarding under what circumstances a student can be readmitted to the University following a break in their studies.
- 6.2 Members of the Committee were supportive of the introduction of the policy and the clarity it provided. The Committee requested, however, that the policy be amended slightly to better reflect the different circumstances for those students who had suspended their studies (most commonly for personal reasons) and those who had had their studies discontinued by the University as a consequence of academic failure. Members of the Committee acknowledged the importance of appropriately differentiating between these two scenarios. The Committee agreed that following these amendments, the paper should be recirculated before being passed to Senate for consideration.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's Note: The policy, 'Readmission', was circulated to the Committee for consideration and, following approval, forwarded to the Senate for consideration at their meeting on 8 June 2016.

DISCUSSION PAPER ON INTERNATIONAL LATE ARRIVALS

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/006)

- 7.1 The Committee received the paper on International Late Arrivals. The Committee were informed that the proposed changes were intended for the 2017/18 academic year and not 2016/17.
- 7.2 Members of the Committee noted that the paper did not make any specific suggestions or pose questions of the Committee regarding late arrivals and, as such, the Committee felt unable to comment on the issue. The Committee did, however, note concern that the deadline for arrivals could be extended beyond the existing two week deadline which already represented two weeks of an 11, or even 6 week, teaching period.
- 7.3 Professor Wells agreed to return the paper for further detail and clarification of the proposal the Committee was being asked to discuss.

Action: Professor Wells

UPDATES FROM TASK GROUPS

- 8.1 The Committee received an update from the Retention Task Group (*minute of the meeting held on 31 March 2016, copy filed as UCTL/110516/007*). Members of the Committee noted the work ongoing by the Group to progress changes to the student withdrawal form, revising the central process for the dissemination of information received regarding withdrawal and to update the website providing students with the options available to them. The UCTL further noted work ongoing to revise and improve induction. Members of the Committee look forward to further developments in this regard.
- 8.2 The Committee received an update from the Assessment & Feedback Task Group. Members of the Committee noted work being undertaken to gather data in regards to assessment and specifically, student feedback on exams and the mapping of assessment to disability requirements. Members of the Committee acknowledged the inclination of the University to

over assess and to examine, rather than continually assess. Members of the Committee look forward to further developments in this regard.

- 8.3 The Committee received an update from the Positive Outcomes Task Group, noting that the group would shortly undertake consultation with students and the benchmarking of disciplines with regards to employability. Members of the Committee look forward to further developments in this regard.

MINUTES AND UPDATE REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

- 9.1 The Committee received an update from the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), specifically noting and approving agenda point 10.2, a proposal to change the composition of the Committee. Members of the UCTL further noted a tabled paper from the QAC reviewing the Annual Programme Review (APR) process as piloted during 2015/16. Members of the Committee agreed with the proposal to continue with the process and to begin the revision of the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process as the next stage in the revision of the University's course and programme review.
- 9.2 The Committee received an update from the Postgraduate Committee, noting that they had recently considered items including; issues of Mental Health affecting Postgraduate Research (PGR) students, induction for international students. Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Programme Review and Writing-up periods. The Committee acknowledged that discussions surrounding mental health were taking place in a number of areas across the University and agreed that, if possible, these discussions should be brought together.
- 9.3 The Committee received an update from the Undergraduate Committee (*minute of the meeting held on 25 April 2016 copy filed as UCTL/110516/012*). Members of the UCTL noted the discussion of Enhanced Study at levels 3 and 4 and proposed that a working group of the Committee be convened to evaluate and discuss the issues arising in further detail.

CHANGES TO REGULATIONS

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/013)

- 10.1 The Committee noted the draft Resolution Changes in 'Regulations for Various Degrees', enacting the changes in degree regulations recommended by the Quality Assurance Committee since May 2015. The Committee agreed to consider the Resolution by way of circulation.

Clerk's Note: The Resolution, 'Regulations for Various Degrees', was circulated to the Committee for consideration and, following approval, forwarded to the Senate for consideration at their meeting on 8 June 2016.

QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (QAC) MEMBERSHIP

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/014)

- 10.2 The Committee was content to approve the proposed, tracked changed revisions to the composition of QAC from academic year 2016/17.

TERM DATES

(copy filed as UCTL/110516/015)

- 10.3 Members of the Committee approved the term dates for academic years 2017/18. Members of the Committee noted the Physician Assistant (PA) programme would now follow the same term dates as Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students.

DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING

- 11.1 The Committee notes the next meetings of the UCTL to be held in 2016/17 as follows:

Wednesday 28 September 2016 in Committee Room 2

Wednesday 14 December 2016 in the Court Room

Wednesday 8 March 2017 in Committee Room 2

Wednesday 26 April 2017 in Committee Room 2