

UNIVERSITY OF ABEREEN
POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING 5 DECEMBER 2016

Present: Prof C Kee (Convenor), Dr A Cuest Ciscar, Dr M Bodig, Ms E Harding, Dr P Hicks, Prof A Hurst, Dr D MacCallum, Dr A McKinnon, Prof C Montagna, Ms S Paterson, Prof E Pavlovskaja, Dr D Sutherland, Dr D Wheatley, Dr S Woodin, with Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Dr C Calder, Ms C Croydon in attendance.

Apologies: Mr L Fuller, Dr B Lord, Prof J Masthoff

CONVENOR'S REMARKS

1. The Convenor discussed how the Postgraduate Committee would focus on taught Postgraduate matters going forward and requested that if any members had responsibility for research Postgraduate matters in their School, or felt that they were not the appropriate person to represent their School on the Committee, to let the Clerk know.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING 19 SEPTEMBER 2016

2. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting on 19 September 2016.
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TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE POPULATION

- 3.1 The Committee discussed FTE figures for new PGT registrations for 2016/17. The Committee noted that the second report mentioned on the agenda would be to follow.
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- 3.2 The Committee noted that PGT numbers were of immediate interest to Schools and their budgets. It was noted that the numbers were challenging and that some Schools experienced a drop.
- 3.3 It was noted that Project 500 had a positive impact on Schools working with central University departments involved in recruitment activities.
- 3.4 The importance of factoring PGT programmes into Schools plans and ensuring programmes were planned well in advance to maximise recruitment potential was noted. It was noted that School engagement with recruitment and tools used to measure PGT experience, such as SCEFs and PTEs, was central to informing what programmes should be run and how they should be run.
- 3.5 The Committee agreed that there was a need to review the activities undertaken by School as part of Project 500. It was noted that a group had been established to look at the operational side of Project 500, but that the Postgraduate Committee would need to look at the strategic aspects, i.e aims and aspirations.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION FOR POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

- 4.1 The Committee discussed concerns raised at the meeting on 19 September 2016 regarding students achieving a GPA at either the level of Distinction or Commendation, but not exiting with those awards due to the requirement that the project also be achieved at Distinction of

Commendation level. The Committee discussed whether there should be a distinction between the taught element of a PGT programme and the research element.

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- 4.2 The majority of the Committee felt that the research element should be distinct and the requirement to achieve a certain level in the project in order to exit with Commendation or Distinction should be retained.
- 4.3 The Committee agreed that Examiner discretion could be used in borderline cases, on consideration of the candidate's entire academic profile, in order to award a Commendation or Distinction in cases where the project did not achieve that level. The Committee noted that the regulations allowed for flexibility and Examiner discretion.
- 4.4 The Committee agreed that there needed to be consistency in use of discretion and any such instances should be recorded in the exam board minutes, along with the rationale behind it.
- 4.5 The Committee discussed whether a set of best practice and guidelines should be established to help inform decisions on use of discretion and ensure consistency across the University. The Committee also discussed whether Schools should report back to the Committee on instances where they had exercised discretion. The Committee had differing views on both matters. Some members felt that it would help ensure consistency; others felt that exam boards were accountable to external examiners and that would be enough to ensure the fairness of discretion that had been applied.
- 4.6 The Committee were asked to consider the issue within their respective Schools. It was agreed to discuss at the next meeting how best to take it forward.

ONLINE LEARNING

- 5.1 The Committee noted that a group of taught Postgraduate programmes were being developed on line with support from the Centre of Academic Development.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that there were significant barriers to studying on campus, for instance visa restrictions or financial circumstances, and that Schools needed to consider how programmes could be delivered differently without compromising quality, be it through online learning or other initiatives such as transnational education.
- 5.3 It was noted that, due to the potential volume of students that could be recruited through online learning, and the differences in learning experience from an on campus student, teaching, delivery and assessment would need to be looked at when developing an online learning programme. It was also noted that the staff time required to develop a programme for online learning, and the administrative support required to support it, was significant and would be a key consideration when exploring online learning.
- 5.4 It was recommended that any Schools wishing to explore how programmes might be delivered online meet with the Deans of Taught Postgraduate to discuss the options and what mode of delivery would work best for certain students.

FRAMEWORK OF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR TAUGHT PROGRAMME COORDINATORS

- 6.1 The Committee discussed a paper regarding a framework of responsibilities for taught Postgraduate Programme Coordinators, previously discussed at its meeting on 24 March 2016.
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- 6.2 The Committee requested that, on the recommended list of expectations, 'leading on programme recruitment, marketing...' be changed to 'leading within the School on programme recruitment, marketing...'

- 6.3 The Committee requested that 'responsibility for strategic development...' and 'responsibility for the sustainability of the programme...' be changed to 'responsibility for academic strategic development' and 'responsibility for the academic sustainability...'
- 6.4 The Committee requested that the list of responsibilities of a course coordinator in Appendix 1 be amended to include 'use of policies outline in the Academic Quality Handbook' in section D.
- 6.5 The Committee approved the recommended framework of responsibilities for programme coordinators and course coordinators, on the proviso that the above changes outlined in 6.3 and 6.4 be made.

ACTION: CLERK

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7. The Convenor stated that he would be keen to discuss particular innovations that Schools have brought in to support taught Postgraduate delivery and to provide case studies on good practice in order to promote excellence.