

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Minute of the Meeting held on 7 December 2016

*Present:* Professor P McGeorge (Convener), Dr T Baker, Mr C Duncan, Professor H Hutchison, Professor A Jenkinson, Professor C Kee, Professor E Pavlovskaja, Dr B Scharlau, Professor K Shennan and Dr S Tucker, with Ms K Christie, Mr P Fantom, Ms P Spence, Dr R Bernard (Clerk) and Ms E Hay (Minute Secretary) in attendance

*Apologies:* Mr C Anucha, Mr L Fuller, and Professor J Masthoff, Dr G Mackintosh and Mr D Philips

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER AND 13 OCTOBER 2016**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/001a and UCTL/071216/001b)*

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meetings held on 23 September and 13 October 2016. The Committee agreed that the minutes were representative of discussions held.

**MATTERS ARISING**

- 2.1 The Convener welcomed the recently appointed Teaching Deans, Professors Hutchison and Pavlovskaja, to their first meeting of the Committee.

- 2.2 Members of the Committee, in regard to minute point 4.1 of the 23 September 2016 minute, requested an update on number of RUK students registered in 2016/17.

**Action: Clerk**

- 2.3 The Committee were informed that, at the meeting held on 2 December 2016, the Senate had approved the UCTL recommendation to remove the requirement for students to undertake Enhanced Study at levels 3 and/or 4. In response to this, the Committee noted that MyCurriculum would now be edited to remove the 'Enhanced' tab from course selection for students at the levels 3 and 4.

- 2.4 Members of the Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to remove this tab from all students' course selection, noting that although Enhanced Study remains a requirement at levels 1 and 2, the existence of this tab can often cause confusion for students. The Committee noted that students would likely still meet the requirements of Enhanced Study.

- 2.5 Members of the Committee agreed that this recommendation should be drafted for consideration for the Senate.

**Action: Clerk**

**TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF)**

- 3.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Convener providing an update on the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in England. Following the presentation discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Members of the Committee noted the concerns raised by the University, and the Scottish Higher Education sector as a whole, with regards to the introduction of the TEF. The Committee acknowledged that Sector concerns had been shared with Westminster.

- Members of the Committee acknowledged concerns as raised by Russell Group Universities regarding the implications the introduction of the TEF may have.
- The Committee noted the requirement that the University must respond with a submission by the 25 January 2017 should the decision be taken to engage with the TEF.
- The Committee acknowledged that, regardless of whether or not the University does decide to engage with the TEF, the process had highlighted several performance areas in learning and teaching the University is seeking to address and improve upon. The Committee agreed on the importance of developing and agreeing strategies at School and Institutional level in order to do so.

## **STRATEGIC DISCUSSION INCLUDING UPDATES FROM UCTL SUB-GROUPS**

### **(i) ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/002a and UCTL/071216/002b)*

- 4.1 The Committee received an update from the Assessment and Feedback sub-group on its ongoing work to address the University's performance in this area. The Committee acknowledged the submission of action plans from Schools in this regard, noting concern, however, that these appeared to be incomplete and failed to provide an appropriate level of detail on the work ongoing within Schools. The Committee agreed that any inaccuracies should be brought to the attention of Planning to allow for the improvement of plans and therefore their usability.

**Action: Professor Kee**

- 4.2 The Committee noted the importance of Schools taking the initiative in implementing local policy to address issues of Assessment and Feedback but also agreed that an Institutional or 'umbrella' policy to encourage best practice was required. Members of the Committee noted work ongoing around areas including student induction, influencing student perception/managing student expectations and means of gathering feedback, such as the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF). The Committee acknowledged that the same approach in each School would not work and that several methods or approaches should be researched, compiled and demonstrated as possibilities to Schools. The Committee further noted that students identifying as a cohort, such as Law or Engineering may be slightly easier to educate in regard to expectations.
- 4.3 The Committee noted that gathering definitive data on the success of approaches to date was difficult and possible, only in robust terms, by way of the National Student Survey (NSS) data on its release in 2017.
- 4.4 Members of the Committee acknowledged the example provided, of the decision taken by the School of Engineering, to publish within course handbooks, data on (i) when course assessments were due and (ii) when feedback on course assessments would be provided. Members of the Committee noted the positive impact of this decision and agreed that consideration could be given to requiring the publication of such data in the Course Catalogue.
- 4.5 The Committee reiterated the importance of (i) expectation management and (ii) structural changes (in the short or long term) in addressing Assessment and Feedback. The Committee noted the importance of setting and providing guidance on 2020 targets and supporting Schools in meeting these. The Chair of the Assessment and Feedback sub-group agreed to feedback the thoughts of the UCTL to the group.

**Action: Dr Baker**

**(ii) RETENTION**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/003a and UCTL/071216/003b)*

4.6 The Committee received an update on the progress of the Retention sub-group and its ongoing work to address the University's performance in this regard. The Committee noted the development of four defined workstreams as follows:

- (i) **Induction:** The Committee noted the work of the group in encouraging a more integrated approach to induction involving all stakeholders, establishing guidelines and interacting with applicants, or interested parties, from as early a stage as possible. The Committee noted the use of Facebook groups in this regard and thus in allowing students to communicate with the University and each other in advance of their arrival in Aberdeen.
- (ii) **Withdrawal:** The Committee acknowledged the introduction of a new withdrawal form, seeking further information from students at the point of withdrawal. The Committee noted the publication of School contacts to students considering withdrawing from their studies.
- (iii) **Communication:** The Committee acknowledged the work being undertaken to improve existing methods of communication and in developing new and innovative methods, such as Facebook groups for applicants and new students. The Committee noted the use of virtual open days for students and the issuing of school contact points to applicants/students at as early a stage as possible.
- (iv) **Data Analysis:** The Committee noted the use of data analysis at all stages to inform strategies and in helping to define risk areas.

4.7 Members of the Committee stated the importance of giving consideration to students who leave the University without informing their School and/or Personal Tutor or completing a withdrawal form. The Committee agreed the importance of targeting students in this position, noting that alternative methods of communication, such as text messaging, may be appropriate for this risk group.

4.8 The Committee discussed the ongoing impact of the Monitoring procedures noting that steps had been taken to communicate C6s to Personal Tutors. The Committee expressed concern over the use of the term 'monitoring' acknowledging that this in itself may be off-putting to students.

4.9 The Committee noted that the work of the Retention sub-group may link to the work of groups chaired by the teaching Deans and created in collaboration with Student Recruitment, addressing communication with applicants from the point of initial enquiry to the University. The Committee agreed the importance of a clear and focussed strategy of all parties in this regard. The Chair of the Retention sub-group agreed to feedback the thoughts of the UCTL to the group.

**Action: Dr Tucker**

**(iii) POSITIVE OUTCOMES**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/004)*

4.10 Members of the Committee agreed to defer the consideration of this item to the next meeting of the UCTL.

**(iv) PROPORTION OF UPPER DEGREES**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/005)*

- 4.11 Members of the Committee agreed to defer the consideration of this item to the next meeting of the UCTL.

#### **UPDATES FROM SUB-COMMITTEES**

- 5.1 Members of the Committee agreed to defer the consideration of this item to the next meeting of the UCTL.

#### **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- 6.1 The Committee noted that the next meetings would be held as follows:

Wednesday 8 March 2017 in the Committee Room 2

Wednesday 3 May 2017 in the Committee Room 2

#### **REVISED REMITS AND COMPOSITIONS FOR UCTL SUBCOMMITTEES**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/006a, UCTL/071216/006b and UCTL/071216/006c)*

- 7.1 Following recent changes to Teaching and Learning organisational structures the Committee approved the revised remits and composition for the Undergraduate Committee, Postgraduate Committee and Quality Assurance Committee.

#### **REMIT AND COMPOSITION OF DIGITAL LEARNING STEERING GROUP**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/007)*

- 7.2 The Committee, for its part, approved the remit and composition of the Digital Learning Steering Group.

#### **INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE TO STUDENTS WHO BECOME PREGNANT OR ADOPT CHILDREN, AND THEIR PARTNERS DURING THEIR STUDIES**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/008)*

- 7.3 The Committee, for its part, approved an updated version of the *Information and Guidance to Students Who Become Pregnant or Adopt Children, and their Partners during their Studies*. The revised version included guidance for students whose partners become pregnant.

#### **AMENDMENT TO RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF PRESCRIBED ASSESSMENTS AND WRITTEN EXAMINATION FOR DEGREES OR DIPLOMAS**

- 8.1 The Committee noted that the Convener had approved an amendment to the Rules for Examinations to more explicitly cover smart devices.

Existing rule 4.13 has been replaced with an amended version:

“Any electronic or smart device, including those that can send and/or receive information or store data are not permitted on your person during an exam. This includes but is not limited to mobile phones, smart watches, e-readers, wearable technology items, fitness trackers and smart glasses. Such devices should be turned off completely and placed in a jacket or bag and left in the area designated by the Invigilators. You may also leave such devices under your

examination desk, turned completely off. Invigilators may ask to see such devices and examine them at any point in the exam room.

Students are permitted to have an analogue or simple digital watch with them during the exam for the purposes of timekeeping. Watches must be taken off and placed on the examination desk for the duration of the exam. Such watches must not have any smart capabilities (regardless of them being turned on) such as messaging, internet access, data storage, calculator or other connectivity abilities. Invigilators may ask to see watches and examine them at any point in the exam room.”

#### **PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

*(copy filed as UCTL/071216/08)*

- 8.2 The Committee noted the remit and composition of the Partnership Board and proposed the addition of one of the four teaching Deans and the Dean for Transnational Education (TNE) to the composition, as appropriate to the partnerships being considered.