

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 24 February 2017

Present: Professor H Hutchison (Convenor), Professor A Jenkinson (Convenor), Dr T Baker, Dr P Bishop, Dr J Borg-Barthet, Dr J Cai, Dr A Graham, Dr W Harrison, Dr A Mackillop, Professor G McEwan, Dr J Perkins, Professor M Pinard, Professor K Shennan, Mrs A Shipley, Dr A Widfeldt, Ms J Adamson (Clerk).

Apologies: Mrs J Bruce, Dr P Davidson, Professor A Denison, Mr P Fantom, Mr L Fuller, Dr M Hole, Dr G Mackintosh.

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2016

(copy filed as UG/240217/001)

- 1.1. Suggested amendment to section 4.2 – Enhanced Study “has met” with a very mixed response. Request to include a statement to clarify that it is because of the ballot process and a lack of option courses at Honours which contribute to the mixed response from students. Otherwise, the Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 16 September 2016 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

UPDATE ON ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION GROUP

(copy filed as UG/240217/002A & UG/240217/002B)

- 2.1. Professor Jenkinson provided an overview of the newly established Engagement and Communication Group, which aims to streamline communication that is sent to prospective students throughout the enquiry and application process and to enhance the quality of such communication. The “Student Journey” flowchart was provided to give an overview of the current plans for the September 2018 cohort. The importance of input from Schools was emphasised and the Committee members were encouraged to disseminate this information to colleagues in Schools. Specifically, feedback was requested regarding how communication can be enhanced and where the optimum points are in the cycle for School involvement. The Group will be collecting data and will report back to the UG Committee at a future meeting.

PROPOSED ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING POLICY

(copy filed as UG/240217/003A & UG/240217/003B)

- 3.1. Mrs Shipley outlined proposals to mainstream six small adjustments which are currently provided for students with disabilities. By mainstreaming these adjustments the University will be promoting standard expectations across the institution for all students and will ensure that students with disabilities have access to appropriate learning and teaching environments without being singled out. The Committee was invited to discuss the draft policy.
- 3.2. Some concerns were raised in relation to section 3.4 of the draft policy, which suggests that key technical vocabulary and formulae should be provided to students at least 24 hours prior to the teaching session. In certain disciplines a class may focus around the derivation of a formula, and therefore it would not be appropriate in these cases to provide formulae in advance. Most terminology/formulae are provided within the lecture slides, which are usually available in advance of the class. It is unclear what would constitute technical terminology and it was noted that in many disciplines a broad range of terms could be considered as technical.
- 3.3. Section 3.5 included the proposal for all students to be permitted to audio record lectures, tutorials and supervision sessions for their own personal learning. Many Committee members expressed concern over students recording in tutorials. Ethical concerns were raised because recording in tutorials would

involve recording the views expressed by other students who may not wish to consent to this. It was also noted that students may not fully participate in tutorials if they were being recorded. Similarly, supervision sessions should not be recorded as these are not necessarily one to one and may involve a small group of students, e.g. a dissertation discussion involving all students being supervised by one member of staff.

- 3.4. There were some queries in relation to 3.5G, which states that students would agree to terms and conditions as part of the contract between students and the University upon matriculation. The Committee queried whether there is a current contract in existence and what is included in this contract. Some Committee members advised against the use of legalistic terminology which could leave the University exposed, e.g. "contract", and would recommend including terminology such as "statement of mutual responsibility" and "remit".
- 3.5. Reference was made to previously discussed policies which included guidance on the use of Camtasia and recording in classes for all students and not just for students with disability provisions.

ACTION: *The Convenors will arrange a meeting with Mrs Shipley and Professor Shennan to further investigate how existing policy documents / draft documents could be used to revise the Proposed Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy, and therefore the Committee cannot recommend the policy in its current form.*

PROPOSAL FOR DISABILITY EXAM DEADLINE

(copy filed as UG/240217/004)

- 4.1. The Committee was asked to consider the proposal to introduce a formal deadline for students to apply for specific exam arrangements. Mrs Shipley reported that the Disability Advisory Service piloted the use of a deadline for the December 2016 exam diet and that this worked efficiently. A deadline is required in order to ensure that students can have provisions implemented in a timely fashion and that the staff involved have sufficient time to action this implementation.
- 4.2. The Committee recommended that the policy be put forward to UCTL with the addition of the proposed deadline date.

EXAM EVACUATION

- 5.1. No current policy or formal procedure exist in relation to what should happen if an exam venue is required to be evacuated. The Committee was asked to discuss if a formal policy should be developed and what factors would be important to consider in this policy.
- 5.2. One key consideration was how to minimise the impact of an evacuation for the students doing the exam, and particularly for students who take exams in a single room and may have higher levels of anxiety. For example, would it be best to void the exam and rearrange the date or would this cause more anxiety than other possible solutions?
- 5.3. The Committee discussed the need for differing action depending on the timing of the fire alarm. If the alarm sounded towards the end of the exam it may be possible to end the exam at that point and count the work completed, whereas if the alarm was at the beginning of the exam the assessment may need to be rearranged.
- 5.4. The Committee discussed that it is highly likely that a new exam paper would be required due to the difficulties of preventing students discussing the exam during the evacuation. The resit paper could potentially be used in this instance.

- 5.5. Health and safety concerns relating to the evacuation of the larger exam venues were raised. It would be necessary to include guidance within an exam evacuation policy on how best to safely evacuate large venues.
- 5.6. The Committee recommend the development of formal guidance to aid decision making in relation to exam evacuation but note that it would be helpful to include some flexibility to allow the Lead Invigilator to use their discretion. It was felt that it would be difficult to develop a single model to cover all scenarios.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO DISCIPLINE CODE OF PRACTICE ON PLAGIARISM

- 6.1. The Committee was invited to consider whether it is necessary to amend the current Discipline Code of Practice on Student Discipline in relation to plagiarism. Specifically, do Schools think that they should be able to deal with a first plagiarism offence on a School level without having to report the suspected plagiarism to Registry?
- 6.2. Professor Jenkinson confirmed that at present the Head of School can inform the Disciplinary Investigating Officer that they wish an alternative course of action to be taken. Although Schools are aware of this option, it was noted that it would be labour intensive to do this for every students' first offence. It would be useful to include a less formal process in the Discipline Code to allow Schools to deal with first offences in-house. This would also reduce inconsistencies emerging between Schools regarding how first offence plagiarism cases are handled.

ACTION: *Professor Jenkinson requested information from Schools regarding how they think first offences should be handled and will follow up on this point at a future UG Committee Meeting.*

- 6.3. Some Committee members noted that Schools can often be reluctant to class a student's first offence as plagiarism and may instead label it as "poor referencing" as they do not wish to escalate the matter to formal appeal due to the serious repercussions it could have for the student. It would be important in this case that a centralised institution-wide database of these informal poor referencing incidents is created to ensure that it is clear when a student has "reoffended", which could be in a different School.
- 6.4. One Committee member suggested that Schools could include more formative exercises to teach students about good practice in referencing prior to the submission of any summative assessments.

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

(copy filed as School Feedback Strategies 2017)

- 7.1. Dr Baker provided an update on the work of the Feedback and Assessment Taskforce and referred to the attached document which includes strategies from each School with regard to how they intend to enhance feedback. Committee members were encouraged to speak to their Taskforce Rep, who has been tasked with disseminating the document to staff in their own Schools by means of School Committees. Schools will be encouraged to compare ideas with other Schools regarding how best to improve feedback. The aim is for Schools to resubmit their strategies after considering points made by other Schools which could enhance their own strategies. A collaborative strategy would then be submitted as a paper for consideration by Senate.

ACTION: *Dr Baker will send Taskforce membership and meeting notes to UG Committee members (via Clerk).*

ENHANCEMENT THEME: STUDENT TRANSITIONS

- 8.1. Professor Shennan provided an update on the Student Transitions Quality Assurance Enhancement Theme. The Theme is now in its third and final year and includes an associated Response Team. Some staff and students will be attending the 3rd International Enhancement in Higher Education Conference in June this year and will present some of the work that the University of Aberdeen has contributed to this theme. The next theme will be announced at the conference.
- 8.2. There will be some small funding awards available as part of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LETP). Further information will be circulated in due course.
- 8.3. The Committee was directed to the Student Transitions webpage and encouraged to inform students about the many useful recourses available.

ACTION: *Professor Shennan will send the link to the Enhancement Themes website to UG Committee members (via Clerk).*

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 9.1. The Committee was asked to consider how the University can share good practice in Teaching and Learning.
- 9.2. The Committee would find it useful to receive updates from members of staff within the UG Committee who attend various Taskforces or Working Groups throughout the University. It would also be helpful to view minutes / notes from such meetings.
- 9.3. In order to easily share updates from Taskforces, etc. the Committee would find it useful for an online digital space to be created. Some suggestions included a SharePoint site or MyAberdeen. The Learners' Toolkit was mentioned as an example of a useful online environment. Any digital space would need to be easy to negotiate and have efficient search functionality.
- 9.4. One Committee member suggested organising a one day conference for University staff, based on an annual conference run by the University of Glasgow. Staff would be able to submit abstracts and present on a wide range of topics. Alternatively, arranging workshops may be a more cost effective method of creating an environment in which staff from different disciplines could share ideas and information on various themes.
- 9.5. The potential benefits of joint practice development were discussed. Schools would share information with a view to developing a co-constructed approach. Programme Co-ordinators should play a pivotal role in these discussions. Individuals within Schools could be identified and tasked with implementing changes in their School. The Feedback and Assessment Taskforce was cited as a good example of a co-constructed approach.

ACTION: *Professor Hutchison will discuss options for sharing good practice online and the possibility of organising teaching-focused events with the Centre for Academic Development.*

FOR INFORMATION

10. **Dates of Next UC Committee Meeting:**

Friday 31 March 2017 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2