UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting held on 25 April 2017

Present: Professor A Jenkinson (Convenor), Professor H Hutchison (Convenor), Dr T Baker, Dr P Bishop, Dr J Borg-Barthet, Dr J Cai, Ms K Christie, Dr P Davidson, Dr T Mighall, Professor M Pinard, Professor K Shennan, Dr A Widfeldt, Dr R Wilkie, Ms J Adamson (Clerk).

Apologies: Mrs J Bruce, Professor A Denison, Mr P Fantom, Mr L Fuller, Dr A Graham, Dr W Harrison, Dr A Mackillop, Dr G Mackintosh, Professor G McEwan, Dr J Perkins.

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 FEBRUARY 2017
(copy filed as UG/250417/001)

1.1.   The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 24 February 2017 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR REVISED ITR PROCESS
(copy filed as UG/250417/002)

2.1.   Professor Shennan provided an overview of the draft proposal for the revised Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process as outlined in the accompanying document. Although the University has been praised through ELIR for the ITR process, it has been observed internally that the focus is based more on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement. If approved, the new ITR process will be piloted with the next School(s) due to complete an ITR.

2.2.   It has been proposed that an ITR panel will be comprised of one member from each of QAC, UG Committee and PG Committee as well as a student representative (all from different Schools). The Committee emphasised the need for individuals involved in panels to receive sufficient training and guidance.

2.3.   The possibility of a UG / PG Committee member nominating a colleague to take their place on a panel was discussed. It was felt that there were many individuals within Schools who have excellent working knowledge of current teaching and learning practice / issues who would be suitable to form part of an ITR panel. It would also be a positive professional development opportunity.

2.4.   Some concerns were raised regarding the panel visits involving both staff and students in pedagogic partnership sessions. It was also noted as important to ensure that the facilitator is suitably experienced in the context of ITRs so that the action plan is tailored to the School's best interests. Profession Shennan confirmed that themes for discussion would be decided by the School and panel members before the panel visit and that the action plan will be a collaborative process.

2.5.   The possibility of running workshops on how to gain the most out of feedback and review sessions in terms of quality enhancement was discussed.

2.6.   The Committee was generally supportive of trialling the revised ITR process and requested feedback as the trial is ongoing.

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES TO RESIT EXAMINATIONS

3.1.   The Committee was asked to discuss the extract from the QAC minute in which suggestions were invited for alternative formats for resit exams, which would enable students to take the assessments off campus.

3.2.   One Committee member enquired as to whether resit assessments had to be taken during the summer exam diet. It was confirmed that due to progression regulations within the University's General Regulations it would be necessary for students to take assessments over the summer to ensure that they can progress to the next year of their degree.

3.3.   Concern was noted regarding running exams off campus with respect to logistics involving different time zones. It was confirmed that there is a procedure already in place whereby students who have exceptional reasons can request to take an exam off campus, but that for the purpose of this proposal suggestions are welcomed for alternative types of assessment.

3.4.   One Committee member noted that if alternative resit assessments were to be implemented the University would have to ensure that students do not selectively choose to take the potentially more preferable resit assessment.

3.5.   Concern was noted regarding ensuring that the original degree assessment and the resit assessment are equivalent academically.

3.6.   The Committee was encouraged to think about how the Virtual Learning Environment could be used to deliver different kinds of assessments. Finding alternatives is not necessarily just limited to use for resits and could impact how first assessments are approached.

3.7.   It was noted that some Schools are already working towards expanding the range of assessment types used.

PROPOSAL TO CAP RESIT MARK AT D3 AND INCLUDE IN DEGREE CLASSIFICATION

4.1.   The Committee was asked to discuss the extract from the QAC minute in which it was proposed that resit grades are capped at D3 and are included in the degree classification calculation. It has been noted by External Examiners that the current procedure of marking the resit but counting the first attempt fail grade towards the degree classification is unnecessarily harsh and is not in line with other Higher Education Institutions.

4.2.   After a lengthy discussion the Committee was in support of using a capped grade of D3 in the degree classification, however some questions arose, as discussed below.

4.3.   Will students receive a D3 on their transcript or will their resit assessment be graded as normal and displayed on the transcript, as it is currently, on the understanding that the grade counting towards classification will be capped?

4.4.   If D3 was to be displayed on records / transcripts would the D3 cap apply to resit assessments at all levels of study? There was concern that if this were to be the case then level 1 and 2 students would be penalised compared to the current system of displaying an actual resit assessment grade. One Committee member noted the importance of level 1 and 2 grades in terms of professional and accreditation purposes. It was also pointed out that in some disciplines (e.g. Medicine) all levels count towards the degree classification.

4.5.   If all resit assessments (excluding students who had GC / MC for the first attempt) were to be capped at D3 the marking could be in terms of pass or fail and this would reduce the impact on markers. The answers to the previously noted questions will determine whether a pass / fail approach can be utilised.

ATTENDANCE MONITORING

5.1.   Professor Jenkinson outlined proposals for a pilot to take place in the next academic year which will involve using QR codes to monitor student attendance in small group (compulsory) teaching sessions. For any timetabled teaching session a QR code can be generated from MyTimetable and used in place of a register. Students will be required to scan this code (either projected on a screen or printed) using their mobile phone.

5.2.   One Committee member raised concern that this proposal assumes that all students have network access on their mobiles. It was confirmed that further clarification is needed on the IT aspects of this technology.

5.3.   It was noted that the main advantages of this system are expected to be administrative in terms of labour (e.g. no need to input data from paper-based registers) and speed of processing, which would lead to a quicker awareness of any students who may have ongoing attendance issues. Schools would then be able to contact the student sooner to find out if they have any circumstances affecting their attendance and initiate support mechanisms.

5.4.   Volunteers are also being recruited to evaluate the use of QR codes in monitoring lecture attendance. The monitoring will not be for the purposes of entering C6s or C7s, and instead will used to evaluate if monitoring lecture attendance can be used to help with student support and retention. The trial will be based on individual courses and will not require a whole School approach. Those who wish to volunteer should contact Steve Tucker.

ASSESSMENT EFFORT

6.1.   Professor Jenkinson highlighted that there is an institutional drive to consider assessment effort and clarified that the institutional target to reduce assessment effort by 20% refers to the effort required towards assessment and does not necessarily mean that assessments should be reduced by 20%. Some examples of what is meant by "effort" include the time taken for students to do an exam, the administrative requirements, and the time taken to mark the assessments. The institutional aim of reviewing assessment effort encourages the consideration of ways in which assessment approaches can be modernised and strives to ensure that assessments are mapped to learning outcomes for courses and programmes. It will be an opportunity for staff to evaluate assessment and consider how improvements could be made.

6.2.   Professors Jenkinson and Hutchison are in the process of arranging a half-day session in which UG Committee members can share experience between their Schools regarding innovative assessment approaches and associated feedback on their success, and ideas for reducing assessment effort required from staff. The provisional date for this session is 14th June.

         ACTION: *UG Committee members are asked to identify three examples of assessment innovation / good practice (please send to* [*academicservices@abdn.ac.uk*](mailto:academicservices@abdn.ac.uk)*) which can be shared with other Schools at the session in June.*

6.3.   One Committee member requested some guidance regarding expected levels of assessment for typical undergraduate courses. It was noted that there are a broad range of assessments across the University.

6.4.   It was noted that when attempting to reduce assessment effort discipline specific requirements will need to be considered and it would be useful to learn more about how other institutions achieve this while maintaining academic standards.

6.5.   The Committee would like clarification regarding when changes to assessments should be implemented and whether SENAS amendments will be required.

CONVENOR NOTE: As per information sent to Heads of School on 25th April, changes to assessment for courses in the first half session of 2017 (starting Sept) do not need to be done through a SENAS form but can be done by emailing these requests to senas@abdn.ac.uk.

FOR INFORMATION

UPDATE ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT AND PLAGIARISM

7.1.   Professor Jenkinson has spoken to relevant colleagues in Registry regarding concerns raised at the previous UG Committee meeting and confirmed many issues are already addressed within the current policy. It has been agreed that guidelines and training can be provided to help Schools apply the early stages of the plagiarism process.

UPDATE ON ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING AND GOOD PRACTICE

8.1.   Professor Hutchison confirmed that the document being produced by Student Advice and Support regarding accessible and inclusive learning will be circulated to the Committee members in due course.

ACTION: Professor Hutchison to circulate document.

UPDATE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

9.1.   Professor Hutchison provided a brief overview of the newly introduced online Professional Development courses, which aim to make students more aware of career planning, employability attributes and potential opportunities within the University for enhancing their employability and self-evaluation skills. At present the zero credit level 1 course, PD1001, is listed as compulsory on all undergraduate degree outlines. It was confirmed that if a student does not pass PD1001 it will not affect their degree progression. It is expected that level 2 and 3 Professional Development courses will be available from September 2017 but will not be mandatory. If colleagues would like further information about these courses they can contact Tracey Innes in the Careers Service.

10.   **Dates of Next UG Committee Meeting TBC**