

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

**Minute of the Meeting held on 16 September 2016**

**Present:** Professor A Jenkinson (Convenor), Dr T Baker, Dr P Bishop, Dr J Borg-Barthet, Dr J Cai, Ms K Christie, Dr P Davidson, Mr L Fuller, Dr W Harrison, Ms C MacDonald, Dr A Mackillop, Dr J Perkins, Professor M Pinard, Professor R Wells, Dr A Widfeldt, Ms J Adamson (Clerk).

**Apologies:** Mrs J Bruce, Professor A Denison, Mr P Fantom, Dr A Graham, Dr M Hole, Dr G Mackintosh, Professor G McEwan, Professor P McGeorge.

**MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 APRIL 2016**

*(copy filed as UG/160916/001)*

- 1.1. The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 25 April 2016 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

**REMIT AND COMPOSITION**

*(copy filed as UG/160916/002)*

- 2.1. The Convenor outlined the new UG Committee remit. Specifically, it was noted that two new posts have been created for "Deans of Undergraduate Studies" and that these Deans would Convene the UG Committee on a two year rotating basis.

**DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS – PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES**

*(copy filed as UG/160916/003)*

- 3.1. The Committee was asked to comment on the handbook "Collaborative Provision, Delivery Partners, Principles and Procedures", which considers procedures relating to national and international delivery partner activities in which a partner organisation delivers the academic material provided by the University of Aberdeen using its own resource and infrastructure. The students studying at delivery partners would gain the award of a University of Aberdeen degree. The University of Aberdeen would be responsible for quality assurance, hence the requirement for the basic principles outlined in this handbook.
- 3.2. Referring to section 5.3.7, it was queried how an exchange would work. It was confirmed that there could potentially be exchanges in the future, however the wording here should be amended.
- 3.3. Regarding section 9.2, clarification was sought on who would be responsible for preparing assessments if all were to be the same at the University of Aberdeen and the relevant partner institution. In order to maintain quality and consistency, it is expected that exams will be written by members of staff at the University of Aberdeen and the assessments will take place at the same time where practical to do so.
- 3.4. Further information was sought regarding the role of the "Link Tutor", described in Annex C. For example, is it expected to be a full time role, and what are the associated resource implications? It was also queried whether the title "Link Tutor" was appropriate. It was confirmed that we would expect to appoint one Link Tutor per programme and that this would be part funding of one FTE. The title is commonly used, but can be amended if deemed necessary.
- 3.5. In reference to Annex E, section B (i), the Committee queried the composition of the review panel. It was noted that this panel would work in a similar fashion to internal teaching reviews (ITR).

- 3.6. It was queried whether the Link Tutor would be on QAC and other university committees. It was confirmed that there is no expectation for Link Tutors to be members of committees and that they would report to committees using the normal route already in place.
- 3.7. Concern was raised regarding the possibility of the Link Tutor taking resource away from Schools as the post could turn out to be more involving than currently thought in order to maintain appropriate levels of service and quality at the delivery partner institution.
- 3.8. It was queried whether there is a projection for the expected number of students that would be studying at delivery partners. The expectation is that within 15 years there will be 3000-4000 students studying at campuses operated by delivery partners.

#### **COURSE SELECTION AT LEVELS 3 AND 4**

*(copy filed as UG/160916/004)*

- 4.1. The Committee was asked to consider the proposal that students should be permitted to choose courses from any discipline, including their degree discipline, to fill the Enhanced Study requirement of 30 credits at levels 3 and 4.
- 4.2. The Committee support the removal of the current restrictions placed on students in which they are required to choose Enhanced Study courses from outwith their degree discipline. It was noted that Enhanced Study is met with a very mixed response from students and takes away the freedom of choice that Curriculum Reform aimed to introduce. It was also noted that for certain disciplines it is not possible for students to take Enhanced study at levels 3 and 4, for example Education students who participate in school placements.
- 4.3. Support for this paper would only be given if Schools were free to create new courses in order to provide some within-discipline options for Enhanced Study. Certain disciplines do not currently have such courses at levels 3 and 4. The example of Psychology was cited, in which all of their courses are prescribed for the degree programme and these are the only courses available in Psychology.

***ACTION:*** *The Convenor will clarify the guidance on within-discipline Enhanced Study options.*

#### **MARKING TIME IN THE FIRST HALF SESSION**

*(copy filed as UG/160916/005)*

- 5.1. The Committee was asked to consider the proposal to move the return of results deadline for the first half session into the first week of teaching in the second half session.
- 5.2. The negative impact of extending the results return deadline into second half session teaching was noted. If students have failed a course they may be able to rectify the situation by taking on additional credits during the second half session, but there needs to be ample time for them to register accordingly. One suggestion was that the deadline to register for courses should be extended into the third week of teaching in order to accommodate the later publication of results.
- 5.3. It was noted that many staff feel they could mark work more thoroughly and provide more detailed feedback if they were given more time to do so. This would also ensure consistency and quality assurance.
- 5.4. If this proposal were to be supported for the reasons stated above, students' expectations would need to be carefully managed so that they know when to expect their results and the reasons for the additional marking time. Schools and/or Registry could be involved in communicating such information to students.

- 5.5. There was support from staff for the proposal to extend the first half session marking deadline, but the Students Association highlighted that students would prefer to continue to receive their marks before the commencement of the second half session. The Committee would also like clarification regarding when the proposed new marking deadline would come into effect.

**ACTION:** *Check timeframe with Academic Services.*

## DEGREE CLASSIFICATION

*(copy filed as UG/160916/006)*

- 6.1. The Committee was invited to discuss the proposal to continue to classify undergraduate and taught postgraduate degree using both the Grade Spectrum and Grade Point Average (GPA) methods of classification. The associated paper suggested that the full range of the Common Grading Scale (CGS) is not being used, especially at the upper end of the scale, which may decrease students' degree classifications.
- 6.2. Many Committee members had concerns surrounding the resource implications of maintaining two methods of degree classification. One School has invested in a database to assist with the Grade Spectrum method and would not be able to maintain such an investment. Due to the staff time required to calculate the classification using Grade Spectrum and subsequently compare it to the results obtained using GPA, using a dual system is not sustainable. However, it was noted that it is important to ensure that students are graduating with the best possible degree within their ability.
- 6.3. Observations from Schools regarding differences between the classifications obtained using the two methods and median have been inconsistent. Several Schools reported that they are awarding more first class degrees under the GPA method of classification and noted that their External Examiners queried the reasons for such an increase. However, other Schools stated the opposite and reported that using the Grade Spectrum increased the likelihood of a higher degree classification. There appears to be a concerning amount of discrepancy between systems based on these observations.
- 6.4. One Committee member queried whether the chart in section 4 does indeed suggest that the full range of the CGS is not being used. It appears to display an almost normal distribution of grades, with the anomalies being B3 and C1.
- 6.5. The Committee feel that in the short term both systems could be used to ensure that students are not disadvantaged. However, the resource implications of doing so must be considered in more detail and further clarification is required regarding how multiple systems should be applied fairly. The Committee would also like clarification on how long Schools would be required to use a dual system method as the wording in section 9 of the paper is ambiguous – “until such time as the full range of the Common Grading Scale is used”.

**ACTION:** *Check proposed use of dual classification system with Academic Services.*

## LECTURE ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR LEVELS 1 AND 2

*(copy filed as UG/160916/007)*

- 7.1. The Committee was asked to discuss the introduction of swipe card entry systems in the six largest lecture theatres to enable the collection of lecture attendance data. The purpose of collecting such data would be to assist with retention. The Committee was invited to comment on the general principle of recording lecture attendance, the potential use of such data in terms of improving retention, and whether lecture attendance monitoring could work alongside Camtasia.
- 7.2. Omission noted in section 2.1. - “Whilst it would be”.

- 7.3. The Committee was concerned about the health and safety implications of students having to swipe their cards when entering a large lecture theatre and the amount of time it would take for classes to enter while the previous class was exiting through the same doors.
- 7.4. In terms of improving retention, such a system of monitoring lecture attendance may have the opposite effect if students feel that they are being monitored too closely and are not being respected as adults. This system could very easily be thought of as too “big brother”. Lecture attendance should not be subject to the C6/C7 monitoring system that already exists. The term “monitoring” should be reconsidered.
- 7.5. The reasons for the introduction of a swipe card system would need to be very carefully communicated to students. It would need to be clear that monitoring lecture attendance is not done to penalise those who do not attend but is aiming to help identify students early in the half session who may not be engaging with their studies because they need help. Such a system has the potential to alienate the students that do attend.
- 7.6. It was noted that such a system could very easily be abused by students swiping the ID cards of their classmates who were not in attendance.
- 7.7. The Committee queried who would be responsible for analysing lecture attendance data and subsequently contacting any students who have not been attending regularly.
- 7.8. The Committee would like to see data from other institutions where swipe card entry is used to monitor lecture attendance – have these institutions noticed any improvement in retention?

***ACTION:*** *Are such data from other institutions available?*

- 7.9. As current policy does not enforce lecture attendance, students should be granted the freedom to choose whether or not they attend. Although many students will catch up with missed lecture material using Camtasia / MyAberdeen, it was felt that it would be rare for a student to fully rely on Camtasia.
- 7.10. Concerns were raised regarding the administrative workload that could be placed on lecturers and course co-ordinators - students who did not attend the lecture may email to explain their absence or if any students were not able to scan their card for whatever reason they may contact the lecturer to explain their reasons for not swiping in.
- 7.11. The Students’ Association suggest that there are more effective ways of improving retention, for example enhanced pastoral care through the Personal Tutor system, especially at the beginning of the session.

#### **ISSUES / PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE UG COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

- 8.1. The Committee was asked to identify issues / priorities to be discussed at future meetings of the Undergraduate Committee. The Convenor invited any such suggestions to be sent via email.

#### **FOR INFORMATION**

9. **CPD Framework for Learning & Teaching: Update on Second Year of Operation**  
*(copy filed as UG/160916/008)*
10. **Dates of UG Committee Meetings in 2016/2017:**

Friday 2 December 2016 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2  
 Friday 24 February 2017 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2  
 Friday 31 March 2017 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2