

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

**Minute of the Meeting held on 25 April 2016**

**Present:** Professor S Davies (Convener), Dr A Arnason, Mr D Auchie, Dr J Cai, Dr S Cleland (*vice Dr P Bishop*), Dr P Davidson, Professor A Denison, Mr P Fantom, Professor J Geddes, Dr A Graham, Professor G McEwan, Professor R Millar, Professor M Pinard, Professor R Wells, Dr A Widfeldt, Ms J Main (Clerk) and Mrs J McLennan (Shadowing Clerk)

**Apologies:** Dr P Bishop, Mrs J Bruce, Ms K Christie, Professor R Evans-Jones, Mr L Fuller, Dr W Harrison, Dr M Hole, Miss Z Howell, Professor A Jenkinson, Dr G Mackintosh, Professor P McGeorge, Dr J Perkins

**MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 04 DECEMBER 2015**

*(copy filed as UG/250416/001)*

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 04 December 2015 as an accurate representation of discussions held. An answer is still being sought to the action point in section 3.2.

**ADDITIONAL CREDITS**

*(copy filed as UG/250416/002)*

- 2.1 The Committee was asked to discuss the proposal to permit students to register via MyCurriculum for up to an additional 15 credit points per half session without seeking approval from a member of staff. The Convenor highlighted two main points arising from this paper: firstly that when a student takes additional credits this dilutes the resource per credit that Schools receive, and secondly, that all additional credits taken from honours courses will be counted towards a student's degree classification.
- 2.2 Some Committee members were concerned about allowing students to decide to take on extra credits without discussing the implications of doing so with an academic member of staff. It was suggested that Personal Tutors could review their students' curricula and discuss such implications. The suggestion was made to reintroduce an academic point of contact as there has been in the past. Concern was raised that we are being driven by a computer system.
- 2.3 The current method for managing additional credit requests was explained to the Committee. When a student wishes to take more than 60 credits in each half session they need to complete a disclaimer form, which gets checked by a member of administrative staff before they manually adjust settings on MyCurriculum and register the student for the additional credits. The Committee was concerned with the lack of academic input involved in the current system.
- 2.4 The administrative impact of the current system on staff in the Student Services Team and the MyCurriculum Team was discussed, although the exact number of students who have signed an extra credit disclaimer form this academic year could not be quantified.

- 2.5 Since it has been agreed that 120 credits constitutes a full time workload, the process of selecting additional credits on MyCurriculum would need to be carefully monitored to ensure that it did not become the norm or an expectation that students would take 150 credits instead of 120.
- 2.6 The Committee noted that in the past if students took on additional honours courses they were required to declare which credits were contributing towards the degree classification, whereas under the new GPA system all honours level credits count. Some students may take advantage of this by taking on extra courses for which they believe they can achieve a higher result in order to boost their degree classification.
- 2.7. Some Schools pointed out that if the current regulation was amended to allow students to select a maximum of 150 credits there would still need to be flexibility to allow students to take all additional 30 credits in one half session as all courses (especially honours courses) are worth 30 credits in some disciplines.
- 2.8 The Committee is against allowing students to register themselves for additional credits using MyCurriculum and feel that academic input is required.

### **ENHANCED STUDY AT LEVEL 3**

- 3.1 The Committee discussed views on the continued inclusion of a compulsory element of Enhanced Study at level 3.
- 3.2 It was highlighted that if the Enhanced Study requirement in Honours was relaxed so that students could have free choice of course for the 30 credits of study over levels 3 and 4, it would seem like all the effort the institution had contributed towards Curriculum Reform (CRef) was redundant.
- 3.3 It was noted that one of the main objectives of CRef had been to encourage discipline breadth because feedback from employers suggested that they would favour students who could demonstrate a wider range of knowledge / skills. The Committee discussed whether the University could do more to communicate the benefits of CRef and Enhanced Study.
- 3.4 Anecdotal evidence, for example comments on SCEFs, seems to suggest that many students would rather take all of their level 3 and 4 courses from within their degree discipline. The Committee discussed whether the lack of Enhanced Study options in level 3 was the main contributing factor to some students' lack of enthusiasm for compulsory Enhanced Study.
- 3.5 It was noted that for Education students it can be challenging to accommodate both school placements and the need to take on campus Enhanced Study courses.
- 3.6 The Committee generally agreed that students should be encouraged to take Enhanced Study but that it should be the students' decision whether they wish to take courses from outwith their degree discipline. However, some Committee members suggested that an evaluation of CRef was required so that the University could make an informed decision as to whether a change is required to the current Enhanced Study requirement. It was also suggested that Schools might want to consider introducing more courses that could be taken as Enhanced Study.

## PROPOSAL TO INCREASE MARKING TIME

*(copy filed as UG/250416/003)*

- 4.1 The Convenor directed the Committee members' attention to Annex A of the "Proposal to Increase Marking Time" paper, in which the week structure of the current academic year was compared against the structure of the academic year should this proposal be accepted.
- 4.2 Concerns were raised regarding extending the January results return deadline to the end of the first week of teaching. During the current academic year students received their results by the commencement of second half session teaching, which enabled them to register for extra credits if they had not passed a non-compulsory first half session course. If results were received during the second week of teaching, although there is still time to register for courses, these students would be at the disadvantage of having missed up to two weeks teaching when they are already taking on an increased workload.
- 4.3 Many Committee members commented on how challenging it is to meet the May exam results deadline in particular. More time is needed in order to get results confirmed by the External Examiner and to calculate the degree classification using both the GPA system and the Grade Spectrum. It was noted that it is seemingly becoming more common for exams to be held during the third week of the exam diet and that this adds extra pressure for markers and administrative staff.
- 4.4 It was noted that if the May deadline was extended by one week, it would remove the additional week gained in the summer by the recent restructuring of the academic year. The Committee were urged to consider whether they wished to lose this additional research time. It was also pointed out that extending the May deadline, but not the resits deadline, would mean students have one week fewer in order to revise for their resits.
- 4.5 Concerns were raised regarding the impact that extending the results return deadline for the resit diet in particular would have on administrative processes that need to occur after results have been received. For example, Registry Officers are required to reassess the records of, and appropriately code for MyCurriculum, all students who took resit exams to determine whether they now meet progression regulations. Liaison is also required between Registry and Schools to determine whether progression waivers can be approved for students who have failed pre-requisite courses. These processes must be complete before MyCurriculum opens for students to register for the coming academic session.
- 4.6 Concerns were raised by the School of Education regarding the knock on effect of changing deadlines in that they may be required to renegotiate dates with their partners for school placements. They would need a year's lead in to accommodate changes to deadlines.
- 4.7 The Committee did not come to a clear consensus. Several members were in favour of extending the May deadline, but extra time was not deemed to be as necessary for the first half session or resit exam diets.

## **INTRODUCTION OF ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES FOR ALL UG STUDENTS**

*(copy filed as UG/250416/004)*

- 5.1 The Convenor outlined the main points from the paper. Zero credit Professional Development courses would be treated similarly to the current Academic Writing courses in that they would be compulsory for level 1 Undergraduates, would appear on degree prescriptions and would be included on transcripts as either “Achieved” or “Not Achieved”.
- 5.2 The timing of the assessments for the Professional Development courses was queried. It was confirmed by the Committee’s Careers Service representative that these courses can be completed at any point during level 1. Students will be able to take the online assessments multiple times and only the final assessment score will be recorded in the Grade Centre.
- 5.3 The Committee was in favour of the introduction of Professional Development courses and also agreed that if students did not pass the courses in level 1 they should be permitted to register for the courses again in subsequent academic years.

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

- 6.1 The Committee was asked to inform the Convenor of any issues they wish to discuss at future meetings.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 7.1 Date of the next meeting TBC.