

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 4 December 2015

Present: Professor S Davies (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Dr J Cai, Dr P Davidson, Dr M Hole, Dr M Law, Professor G McEwan, Professor M Pinard, Dr A Simpson, Professor R Wells, and Dr A Widfeldt and Ms J Main (Clerk).

Apologies: Mr D Auchie, Mrs J Bruce, Ms K Christie, Professor R Evans-Jones, Mr P Fantom, Mr L Fuller, Professor J Geddes, Dr A Graham, Dr W Harrison, Miss Z Howell, Professor A Jenkinson, Professor A Lumsden, Dr G Mackintosh, Professor P McGeorge, Professor R Millar, Professor R Patey, Dr J Perkins.

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2015

(copy filed as UG/041215/001)

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 16 October 2015 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

GREEN PAPER CONSULTATION

(copy filed as UG/041215/002a)

- 2.1 The Committee was asked to discuss the UK Government Green Paper "Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice". The Convener provided a brief overview of the rationale of the paper. In the context of the Green Paper as well as the Commission on Widening Access Interim Report *(copy filed as UG/041215/002b)* and the HEFCE analysis of responses to the consultation on "Future Approaches to Quality Assessment in England and Wales" *(copy filed as UG/041215/002c)*, the Committee discussed the following points:

Guidance on Degree Classifications

- 2.2 It was noted that more than 70% of graduates now get a First Class or 2:1 degree and that in 2013/14 over 50% of students achieved a 2:1, which suggests that considerable variation in attainment is disguised within the bands of the current classification system [*Green Paper*, p.26]. The Committee discussed whether the Government proposed 13 point Grade Point Average (GPA) system should be introduced at the University of Aberdeen in order to be consistent with institutions in England and Wales or whether the University should design its own GPA system. It was noted that the University already employs a similar system by using the Common Grading Scale.
- 2.3 One benefit of using the same GPA as the rest of the UK would be to increase transparency and allow prospective students to make informed comparisons between attainment levels at different universities within the UK. The GPA would also be a potentially useful tool to assist employers. The Committee expressed concern with having an Aberdeen GPA in addition to a nationally recognised GPA in the rest of the UK.
- 2.4. The Committee discussed which levels of study should be included in a GPA system and some members expressed concern at including levels one and two within the degree classification. On many degree programmes the courses studied at level one amount to less than 50% in the degree discipline and it was questioned whether including all level one courses in a GPA was representative. Regarding the inclusion of level two courses in a GPA, the Committee

discussed the possibility of only including the grades from the prescribed courses for the students' degree programme. Including level two courses within the GPA may increase students' engagement with their studies, leading to a more solid knowledge base before students commence Honours. However, one concern with this suggestion was that students on certain degree programmes start from complete beginners whereas others continue with a subject they learned at school, which may give the latter cohort an advantage in terms of higher grades at levels one and two. The Committee agreed that level one grades should not be included in the GPA, but there was no clear consensus regarding the inclusion of level two grades. It was noted that if the purpose was to provide greater granularity of our current degree classification then it should be based on level 3 and 4 only, however if the purpose was to facilitate comparison between institutions it would have to conform to whatever national system is agreed.

- 2.5 The Committee queried how the University intends to pilot the use of a GPA system and stressed the importance of such a pilot.

External Examining Arrangements

- 2.6 The Committee was asked to consider the question "Do you agree that the external examining system should be strengthened in the ways proposed, i.e. through additional training and the establishment of a register?" [HEFCE, *Future Approaches to Quality Assessment in England and Wales*, p.22]. It was noted that the University already offers training to its staff on external examining and provides material on the website to assist our External Examiners from other institutions. In order to improve consistency and to clarify the University's expectations of External Examiners and the regulations to which they must adhere, it could be beneficial to introduce some more formal training (for example, a half hour online course). This material could also be used to provide an overview of external examining to the University's own staff.
- 2.7 The Committee concluded that having a register of External Examiners could be a useful tool to assist with the recruitment of Examiners. Such a register should be treated as a list of Academics who wish to be considered as External Examiners and it should not become a formal requirement for all Examiners to be recruited from a register. Applying to be included on the register should be a simple and quick process so as not to discourage applicants.

Quality Code

- 2.8 The Committee was asked to consider the question, "Do you agree that future approaches to quality assessment should be based on an assumption that one size can no longer fit all?" [HEFCE, *Future Approaches to Quality Assessment in England and Wales*, p.9]. The Committee agreed that it would be difficult to develop an approach that could be applied to all institutions, and therefore one size does not fit all.
- 2.9 The proposals in the Green Paper regarding institutions being awarded up to four levels of recognition for quality were highlighted. Specifically, the Committee discussed the question, "Do you agree that there should be a baseline requirement for the quality of the academic experience for students, and that this should be published and maintained?" [HEFCE, *Future Approaches to Quality Assessment in England and Wales*, p.13]. Suggested criteria that the University could include in a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) style baseline for quality included student experience, links to industry, student engagement, fellowship of the Higher

Education Academy (or equivalent), teaching facilities, teaching qualifications of staff and student attainment. The Committee recognised the need for the University to be comparable with institutions in the rest of the UK in terms of quality assurance measures. It was noted that the University already participates in the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). The Committee voiced strong concerns regarding a published baseline if this would be similar to the Teaching Quality Assurance (TQA) regime.

USE OF CAMTASIA

(copy filed as UG/041215/003)

- 3.1 The Committee was presented with feedback from members of staff from the School of Law regarding the possible compulsory use of Camtasia. The majority of the staff members surveyed were against introducing compulsory Camtasia use in 100% of teaching sessions. Many had concerns regarding the effect compulsory Camtasia use in all teaching sessions would have on attendance and commented that it is beneficial when lecturing to be able to interact with students and judge their understanding of the lecture content. Some members of staff did contribute positive experiences with Camtasia and did not feel that attendance was adversely affected.
- 3.2 Legal concerns surrounding copyright and intellectual property were raised. It was clarified that the University has already addressed such concerns, but it was not known where this information was published.

[Action: Clerk]

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 4.1 The next meeting of the Undergraduate Committee will be held on Friday 25 March 2016 at 2.00pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.