

UNIVERSITY OF ABEREEN

POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF MEETING 10 OCTOBER 2011**

Present: Dr B. Connolly (Convenor), Ms J. Batty, Ms T. Birley, Mr Butler-Perks, Prof B. Naphy, Dr E. Pavlovskaja, Dr M. Pinard, Ms A. Slater, and with Mrs K. Allan, Ms C. Croydon, Mr A. Monteith, Mrs K. Slessor, Mrs J. Wootten, and Mr R. Findlay (Clerk) and Mr A. Wallace in attendance.

Apologies: Mr P. Fantom.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING ON 9 MAY 2011**

1. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting on 9 May 2011  
Copy filed as PGC/101011/001

**MATTERS ARISING**

*Minute 43.3*

- 2.1 The Committee requested that an update on the Learning to Work 2 project be provided.  
**ACTION: CLERK**

*Minute 46*

- 2.2 The Committee noted that SRAS had updated the University web-pages to reflect the new English language requirements outlined by the UKBA.

**NEW REGISTRATIONS FOR 2011/12**

- 3.1 The Committee noted the report, taken on 7 October 2011, on the numbers of new students registering for the 2011/12 academic year.  
Copy filed as PGC/101011/008
- 3.2 The Committee noted that there had been a drop in numbers of applications from India, which was likely to have resulted from the withdrawal of the Post Study Work Visa. The Committee also noted that there had been a drop in numbers of applicants from China, which may partly have resulted from the raised IELTS level requirements.
- 3.3 The Committee agreed that the timing of the first meeting had been too soon in October and that the Committee should meet after Snapshot 1 figures were available in order to have a fuller and more detailed picture of the number of new students registering for the relevant academic year. The Committee requested that the first meeting for 2012/13 and onwards be held mid to late October.

**ACTION: CLERK**

**ADMISSIONS FIGURES FOR JANUARY 2012 START PROGRAMME**

- 4.1 The Committee noted the admission figures for taught postgraduate programmes starting in January 2012. The Committee noted that there were likely to be deferrals from September 2011 that were still being processed by Admissions and, thus, would not have been taken account of in the report provided.  
Copy filed as PGC/101011/009

- 4.2 The Committee felt that the new English language requirements outlined by the UKBA would most likely result in a drop in numbers of applicants from Africa for 2012/13.
- 4.3 The Committee requested confirmation as to whether the new English language requirements set by the UKBA would apply to students deferring from September 2011 to January 2012 admission.

**ACTION: AM**

#### **PRO-FORMAS FOR TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE ADMISSION CRITERIA**

- 5.1 The Committee agreed that, rather than bring them all before the Committee, the Heads of Graduate Schools should review the pro-formas submitted by programmes within their own College and that any issues should be brought to the Committee for discussion.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that, Admission Selectors had been appointed for cognate areas within each College as far as possible, and that back-up Selectors had been also been put in place to provide cover should a particular Selector not be present. The Committee noted that for certain programmes, particularly ones that were accredited, it would not be appropriate to assign selectors on the basis of cognate areas.
- 5.3 The Committee agreed that training of Admission Selectors should be conducted at a College level, with input from SRAS.

**ACTION: ACRs**

- 5.4 The Committee requested that the admission protocol created by COPs be circulated to both CASS and CLSM.

**ACTION: CLERK**

#### **COMMISSIONED MARKET RESEARCH**

- 6.1 The Committee noted that the commissioned market research, conducted by Knowledge Partnership, would look at the following areas: Biological Science, Business, Engineering, Language and Literature, Law, Medical Science, Medicine and Dentistry, Natural and Computing Science, and Social Science. The Committee also noted that the research would give priority to recruitment from China, India, the Middle East, and Nigeria, and that it would also benchmark the University against 10 other comparable institutions.
- 6.2 The Committee requested that consideration be given to looking at recruitment potential from South America, as opposed to India, given the recent drop in numbers from the latter.
- 6.3 The Committee noted that recommendations would be announced by the Knowledge Partnership in December 2011/January 2012.
- 6.4 The Committee requested clarification on the progress of the discussions within senior management as to the development of the University's distance learning provision. The Committee also requested confirmation as to whether funds would be provided to assist the development of new taught postgraduate distance learning programmes.

**ACTION: CLERK**

#### **HOBSONS**

7. The Committee noted concerns relating to the use of Hobsons for following up on applicants who had received an offer to study at the University but had not yet replied. The Committee agreed that the format of the data provided had not been effective.

### POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEYS 2011

- 8.1 The Committee discussed the results of both PRES and PTES 2011.  
Copies filed as PGC/101011/002 and PGC/101011/003
- 8.2 The Committee noted the less than satisfactory response rates and agreed that the actions for 2012 should address this. The Committee suggested the following as potential ways of improving the response rate:
- promotion through Twitter or Facebook
  - hosting the taught survey on MyAberdeen
  - direct promotion through relevant academic staff members
  - combining completion/promotion of the survey with a social occasion
  - increased use of class representatives to promote
  - an eye-catching incentive, such as an iPad.
- ACTION: CLERK**
- 8.3 The Committee agreed that more needed to be done to inform students about the improvements that had resulted from completion of the survey. The Committee requested that, when students are asked to complete a survey, they be sent both the results of the previous year's survey and the actions that had been taken to address the issues raised.
- ACTION: CLERK**
- 8.4 The Committee discussed the issue of pastoral care of postgraduates. The Committee felt that students may not have been aware of who they should go to seek non-academic advice, and also that there may not be enough opportunities for social interactions with other students.
- 8.5 The Committee felt that the identification of another academic member of staff to provide non-academic advice may not be the best solution. The Committee discussed the now defunct 'buddy scheme' and requested that information as to how the scheme operated in previous years.
- ACTION: CLERK**
- 8.6 The Committee requested that the Student's Association bring suggestions on pastoral care and peer-group support to the next meeting.
- ACTION: TB AND JB**
- 8.7 In regard to the issue of timely return, and usefulness, of feedback, the Committee requested that information be circulated on the University's 'feedback' website, with suggestions to be sought as to postgraduate specific information that could be included.
- ACTION: CLERK**
- 8.8 The Committee agreed that the establishment of one standard system of referencing for all University of Aberdeen students would be beneficial and would help to overcome certain problems experienced in recent cases of plagiarism. The Committee requested that this be conveyed to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.
- ACTION: CLERK**

- 8.9 Dr Connolly confirmed that she would circulate a list of action points from both surveys for approval of Committee members.

**ACTION: CLERK**

- 8.10 The Committee agreed that the University should register its interest in participating in PTES 2012 with the Higher Education Academy. The Committee noted that PRES would not run next until 2013 and agreed that a local PGR survey should run in 2012. The Committee felt that this survey should focus on certain specific issues, as opposed to the PGR experience in general.

**ACTION: CLERK**

### **SKILLS FOR RESEARCH EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME**

- 9.1 The Committee noted the timetable of courses scheduled to be delivered as part of the Skills for Research Excellence programme.

Copy filed as PGC/101011/010

- 9.2 The Committee noted that the delivery of skills courses were not recognised as part of the workload model and that this created difficulty when trying to recruit University staff to deliver them.

- 9.3 The Committee requested clarification on discussions had as to the administration of the Skills for Research Excellence programme.

**ACTION: CLERK**

- 9.4 The Committee discussed the issue of attendance at the courses, but felt that a potential £25 charge for students who had booked a place but not turned up should be reviewed once the resource and administration for delivering the programme had been confirmed.

- 9.5 The Committee agreed that the formal coding of skills courses would allow the University to have an explicit requirement for a research student to undertake a certain number of courses each academic year. The Committee also agreed that coding the courses would enable attendance registers to be maintained. Dr Connolly agreed to investigate the process of coding the courses and report back to the Committee.

**ACTION: BC**

- 9.6 The Committee requested that members review the programme of courses to be delivered and report back to Dr Leiper if they had suggestions on additional courses that might be run.

- 9.7 The Committee noted that the Staff:Student Liaison Committee, ran by Prof Naphy to garner feedback from students on the skills courses provided, had been very useful and agreed that it should be ran again later on in the academic year, in order to monitor the progress of the Skills for Research Excellence programme.

**ACTION: BN**

- 9.8 The Committee agreed that the training needs analysis tool provided on the Skills for Research Excellence programme should be simplified and discussed the possibility of a student-led project to develop such a facility. The Committee requested that Ms Croydon discuss the possibility with Prof Edwards.

**ACTION: CC**

### **STRUCTURE OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR**

- 10.1 The Committee discussed proposals to change the structure of the academic year.  
Copy filed as PGC/101011/004
- 10.2 The Committee felt that bringing forward the start date for the autumn semester would be problematic for Postgraduate Admissions and would shorten an already tight timeframe in which international students need to secure their visa for studying in the UK. The Committee noted that some international students had arrived late due to difficulties in securing their visa.
- 10.3 The Committee did feel that the retention of a 12-week teaching semester was desirable, as certain areas would find it difficult to contract the teaching into a shorter time period.
- 10.4 The Committee noted that there would be certain benefits to holding examinations before Christmas, but also felt that international students studying in the UK for the first time benefited from the break between teaching and examinations and the revision time that allowed.
- 10.5 The Committee felt that an induction week for January start students would be beneficial.
- 10.6 The Committee suggested that the academic year could be different for undergraduates and postgraduates, although it was noted that this may produce too much of an extra burden of work for academic staff involved in the delivery of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It was noted that such staff may find themselves teaching on one programme whilst marking examinations for another.
- 10.7 The Committee requested information on start dates for taught postgraduate students at other UK institutions.

**ACTION: CLERK**

*(Clerk's note: it was subsequently agreed by the Convenor of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning that a working group of UCTL should be set up in order to discuss the issues raised in regard to the Structure of the Academic Year. The working group was to report back to the Postgraduate Committee, as well as other relevant committees)*

#### **RESITS AT TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL**

- 11.1 The Committee discussed the issue of resits at taught postgraduate level and noted the provision at other UK institutions.  
Copy filed as PGC/101011/005
- 11.2 The Committee felt that international students would benefit from the possibility of resits.
- 11.3 The Committee felt that some provision for resits should be allowed. Dr Connolly agreed to draft a proposal for resits at taught postgraduate level and to circulate that to Committee members for approval.

**ACTION: BC**

#### **NEXT MEETING**

12. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 12 December 2011.

15 December 2011

[Type text]

[Type text]

*[Clerk's note: the Convenor agreed that the items on exams being held off-campus (copy filed as PGC/101011/006) and postgraduate graduate attributes(copy filed as PGC/101011/007) should be deferred until the meeting on 12 December 2011.]*