

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minute of the Meeting held on 19 February 2019

Present: Professor P McGeorge, (Convener), Dr T Baker, Professor A Jenkinson, Mr O Kucerak, Professor E Pavlovskaja, Professor K Shennan and Dr S Tucker, with Dr R Bernard, Dr D Comber, Ms N Kinchin-Williams, Ms P Spence and Ms E Hay (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Ms D Connolly, Mr C Duncan, Dr B Scharlau, Professor R Wells, and Ms K Christie, Ms T Innes and Dr G Mackintosh

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2018

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/001)

- 1.1 The Convener opened the meeting and welcomed members of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 12 December as an accurate representation of discussions held.

MATTERS ARISING

- 2.1 The Committee noted that the actions arising from the meeting held on 12 December 2018 had been taken forward, as reflected in the minute by way of Clerk's Note.

HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLBEING

- 3.1 The Committee identified no specific issues arising relating to Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

(i) **WEIGHTING OF HONOURS YEARS**

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/002)

- 4.1 The Committee received the paper on the Weighting of Honours Years, noting the revisions made to it since the Committee had considered it last. The Committee acknowledged the proposal in the paper to move to a position of all Schools classifying degrees on the equal weighting of levels 3 and 4 (and 5 where appropriate). It was noted that where a School or Discipline wishes to deviate from this, they must make a case to a Panel to seek approval to weight differently.
- 4.2 The Committee acknowledged discussions ongoing amongst the Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Quality Assurance Committees in regards to the proposal. It was acknowledged that feedback from members of these Committees and their constituents would influence potential redrafts of the paper, ahead of its submission to the Senate. The Committee agreed the importance of highlighting where changes have been made to the paper and including references to the feedback which influenced the change(s).
- 4.3 The Conveners of the Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Quality Assurance Committees informed members of the UCTL of feedback received from their Committees to date. The main tenets of this feedback was as follows:

- That feedback from all 3 Committees centred upon the need for consistency, particularly in regards to joint degrees.
- With reference to level 5 , it was suggested that references to it within the paper be improved further, particularly with regard to the stated requirement that level 3 contribute a minimum of 30% to overall classification, a stipulation that may not be possible for 5 year programmes.
- That, increasingly, Schools were considering a 70/30 split as a more appropriate means of classification than 50/50.
- Concerns were raised regarding the Panel referred to within the paper, tasked with responsibility for the consideration of submissions from Schools/Disciplines to weight differently. The concerns included the composition of the panel, the criteria it would work within and the timeline to which it would operate.
- Concerns were raised around articulating students, transitioning directly into level 3 and undertaking courses which would form part of their honours calculation immediately. The Committee noted that this would affect not only College articulations but International Student articulation agreements too.

4.4 Members of the Committee acknowledged the culture shift a move to a 70/30 split could cause amongst the majority of Arts and Social Science Schools, where a weighting split of 50/50 is currently adhered to. It was noted that course content across Honours years is currently designed to reflect the 50/50 model.

4.5 The Committee noted the risks associated with allowing a inconsistent approach. The Committee acknowledged moves in England to ensure consistency across Institutions and the sector as a whole.

4.6 The Committee agreed the importance of looking at the ownership of joint honours programmes across the Institution and ensuring single School ownership of them. Members of the Committee acknowledged the importance of a School taking responsibility for each joint programme and joint degrees being classified under the rules of the owning School.

4.7 Members of the UCTL noted that Senate had voted for consistency in 2014. The Committee agreed their preference for consistency across the Institution.

4.8 The Committee acknowledged the outcome of a recent degree class consultation undertaken in England had been to propose that Institutions publish information on how degree classifications are calculated, by subject. With this in mind, the Committee agreed that where there is divergence from the University's agreed position, this must be agreed and published along with the reasoning for it. The Committee agreed that divergence should only be approved where there are sound, academic reasons for doing so.

4.9 With regards to the consideration of exceptions to an agreed position, the Committee agreed that it would be for an agreed panel to consider cases. Members agreed the importance of clearly defining the role of the panel and the criteria they would adhere to. The UCTL noted that the University must be able to defend its position externally. The importance of this was further emphasised by the recognition of increased scrutiny around degree classification across the sector.

(ii) BORDERLINES

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/003)

- 5.1 Members of the Committee discussed the paper on Borderlines, noting the proposal to change the terminology used from the 'borderline' to the 'zone of discretion'. The Committee agreed that the University must be able to ensure consistency in awarding degree classifications and to be able to explain its actions.
- 5.2 The Committee acknowledged the trajectory across the sector, to ensure the transparency and publication of information such as that of how borderlines are used. The Committee noted feedback from the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees and the Assessment and Feedback Taskforce for consistency and an agreed consensus that the existing borderline zone was too wide and should be reduced.
- 5.3 Members of the UCTL agreed that viva examinations should not be used for borderline students.
- 5.4 The Committee agreed the importance of the function of Examiners Meetings. The addition of examples to the paper was proposed.

(iii) ROUNDING UP OF COURSE GRADES

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/004)

- 6.1 The Committee considered the paper on the Rounding up of Course Grades. The Committee acknowledged feedback from the sub-Committees that the rounding up of course grades should be abolished.
- 6.2 Members of the Committee acknowledged that it might be useful to provide students with a translation of their marks to the standard 4.0 GPA scale.
- 6.3 Members of the Committee stated that they felt it was appropriate for students to have the ability to see their GPA at all times, raw to 2 decimal points.
- 6.4 With regards to the release of numeric grades, the Committee noted the importance of providing advice to Schools on accepted practice, covering issues such as which marks should be released at component level, and, when component marks are combined, there should be course level alphanumeric and numeric data.
- 6.5 The Committee acknowledged that the direction of travel within the UK was to move to the use of GPAs, making degree classifications significantly less valuable.

Action: Professor Shennan

Clerk's Note: Papers to proceed to the meeting of the Senate scheduled for Wednesday 20 March 2019 for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR) PANEL

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/005a and UCTL/190219/005b)

(i) EXTERNAL EXAMINING

- 7.1 Members of the Committee noted the draft Recommendations of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) Panel. The Committee acknowledged the recommendation of the panel that External Examiner's Reports be published to staff and students.

- 7.2 The Committee agreed with the proposal made by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) that a section, to be determined and proposed to the UCTL for approval, be identified for publication. The Committee expressed concern that information provided by External Examiners could be lost by making reports publically available, in their entirety.

Action: Professor Shennan/Clerk

(ii) POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

- 8.1 Members of the Committee acknowledged recommendation 10 of the report, regarding the Postgraduate Research School. The Committee agreed that the recommendation should be discussed and led by the School. Members of the Committee acknowledged the possibility of providing training to all staff, with the expectation that it is undertaken and refreshed as required. Members further acknowledged that courses, potentially delivered online, could be developed and led centrally, however, Schools may also wish to deliver School specific training. The Committee acknowledged the view of the Senior Management Team (SMT) that training become mandatory for all staff and Postgraduate students. The Committee agreed that the issue should return to the UCTL for discussion and approval, once a solution had been identified.

Action: Professor Nixon

(iii) PREPARATION FOR TEACHING

- 9.1 The Committee noted recommendation 11 of the report regarding Preparation for Teaching and 'ensuring all new staff and postgraduate who teach and assess complete, as a minimum, the University's 'Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (HE)' course before taking up teaching responsibilities.' Members of the Committee noted that the SMT had also agreed that this requirement should be mandatory across the University.

- 10.1 The Committee acknowledged the importance of discussing the recommendation and whether the existing Learning and Teaching in HE 2-day course was the appropriate means of providing teaching staff and students with appropriate training. The Committee acknowledged that it alternatives may include incorporating training into existing training for postgraduate students. The Committee also noted the importance of ensuring staff and students receive the appropriate level of development, recognising the level of teaching experience they have. The Committee recognised the huge undertaking of providing training to all. It was agreed that initial discussions should take place between the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) and the Deans to establish practical solutions and an appropriate approach to meeting the recommendation. The Committee agreed that those engaged in teaching must have the appropriate training.

Action: Ms Spence/Professors Jenkinson, Nixon and Pavlovskaja

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 6.2 The Committee noted that that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 22 April 2019 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.

SHORT COURSE DEGREE REGULATIONS

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/007)

- 7.1 On the recommendation of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) members of the Committee approved the proposed Degree Regulations for Short Courses.

MINUTES AND UPDATE REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

8.1 Members of the Committee noted the minutes of the sub-committees, copy filed as follows:

- (i) Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) *(copy filed as UCTL/190219/008a)*
- (ii) Postgraduate Taught Committee (PGTC) *(copy filed as UCTL/190219/008b)*
- (iii) Undergraduate Committee (UGC) *(copy filed as, UCTL/190219/008c)*

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM AGAINST GRADUATES OF THE UNIVERSITY

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/009)

8.2 Members of the Committee noted the update to the Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Plagiarism against Graduates of the University, approved by way of Convener's action since the last meeting of the Committee. Members were advised that the changes made reflected the removal of Colleges.

RESITS

(copy filed as UCTL/190219/010)

8.3 Members of the Committee noted the paper, approved by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), providing clarification of the rules for resits following the decision of the Senate, taken in May 2018, that resits be capped at D3 for GPA calculation and classification of degrees at UG and PGT.