

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE
(11 March 2011)

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2011

Present: Dr J Morrison, Mrs C Baverstock, Professor M Cotter, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr D McCausland, Professor P McGeorge, Ms M McHaney, Professor W Long, Ms J Paton, Professor G Walkden, Dr R Wells, Ms Katja Christie, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms P Spence with Ms Alyson Hogg (Clerk) in attendance.

Apologies: Dr J Perkins

MINUTES

15.0 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2010.

(copy filed as UGC/110311/012)

PROACTIVE INTERVENTION / RETENTION

16.0 The Committee noted the paper outlining proposals from the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) to adopt two key measures aimed at supporting students identified as likely to be at risk of withdrawing from study prematurely.

(copy filed as UGC/110311/013)

16.1 The Committee noted the first proposal was for new students, identified as being at risk of withdrawing to be automatically assigned a student mentor in advance of their arrival on campus. The student mentor would then arrange to meet with the new student to help them with any queries and to provide basic support. The second proposal was for new students identified as being in the at risk category to be allocated to experienced Advisers who would be asked to make contact with those students in advance of the start of Freshers' Week.

16.2 The Committee queried how these 'at risk' students would be identified before they arrive at University. The Committee noted that this type of data could be obtained from Registry. The Committee further noted that students likely to be at risk of withdrawing from study prematurely are normally identified by a combination of factors, including students from both AB and IV postcodes, students from low participation neighbourhoods as well as students who achieve less than 180 UCAS points.

16.3 In relation to the above, the Committee agreed that although there may be trends which could be derived from the data provided by Registry some members queried how accurate the data was. For example, a large percentage of students from both AB and IV postcodes may indeed withdraw earlier than other students; however this is where the largest intake of our students comes from.

16.4 Following lengthy discussion, it was evident that there was strong support for the concept of providing support to these 'at risk' students; however certain members were keen to ensure that this be developed and rolled out to **all** students, not just one specific targeted group.

16.5 In terms of equality, members were extremely concerned that students may feel stigmatised by this categorisation. Some members felt strongly that students should be judged purely on their own merit and **not** their postcode. The Committee also felt it was important for students to feel they have been given a chance to prove what they can do, and that by categorising them before they have even arrived at University could have a detrimental effect.

- 16.6 The Committee agreed that the proposal could be trialled in the CASS, as far as practical. However, before agreeing to this, the Committee requested that an impact assessment be undertaken by Ms Janine Chalmers, the University's Equal Opportunities Adviser. It was agreed that the Convener would contact Ms Chalmers directly to discuss further.

Action: Convener

- 16.7 In discussing moving the first proposal forward, concerns were raised relating to who would administer the procedure? It was agreed that this would have to be discussed in more detail between the Convener and SRAS.

Action: Convener and SRAS

- 16.8 In regards to the second proposal, discussion centred round the issue of the number of Advisers per School and the number of advisees per Adviser. Evidently across the University more Advisers need to be appointed to reduce the number of advisees per single Adviser. The Committee requested that a recommendation be made to Heads of School to appoint more Advisers in a timely manner.

Action: Clerk

- 16.9 The possible resource implications associated with having to identify 'at risk' students and assign these to specific Advisers was also flagged and noted by the Committee.

INDUCTION ACTIVITIES AND TIMETABLING PROVISION

- 17.0 The Committee received a paper outlining proposals for changes to induction activities and timetabling provision for September 2011. In addition, the Committee were briefed on discussions coming out of the sub group of the UG Committee, which met previously to discuss induction activities and timetabling provision.

(copy filed as UGC/110311/014)

- 17.1 The Committee acknowledged the problems experienced by students last September in using the online Central University Timetable via their Student Portal. The Committee noted the timetabling information held on the Portal was difficult to interpret and confusing in that **all** possible classes were listed, not just those pertaining to each student.

- 17.2 In discussing the above, the Students' Association advised the Committee that, following their advising appointments, students were often left lost and confused. The Committee agreed that ensuring students know where they are going for the first week of teaching, was an extremely important part of the overall Student Experience and one which had to be rectified for this September.

- 17.3 The Committee noted the proposal for hard copy timetables to be given out to students during Advising. These timetables would be produced by individual Schools (School Administrative staff) and delivered to Advising venues in advance of Advising and Registration. It is anticipated that students would then leave their Adviser with a maximum of four pieces of paper providing timetabling information for their first half-session courses. In addition to this, students would be given details on how to sign up for tutorials/practicals on the back of the timetabling information. It was noted this would be discussed further by the sub group of the UG Committee at their forthcoming meeting.

- 17.4 In respect to the above, opinion was divided amongst the Committee. Some members felt that additional paper at Advising would add volume to the process; whereas other members were of the opinion that despite the volume of paper given out at Advising, students would be more than satisfied with a hard copy timetable. Following lengthy discussion the Committee acknowledged that although this proposal was a low-tech alternative it would be extremely effective and would go some way to helping alleviate student concerns.

- 17.5 The Committee were informed that for the first few weeks of teaching consideration was being given to whether the Student Portal could be amended to show only the lecture information (remove all information relating to tutorials and practicals). The Committee agreed that this would be helpful and would reduce confusion amongst students. The Committee requested that this proposal be explored further by the Central Timetabling team.

Action: Jennie Pearson

WORKING GROUP ON COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE (CAS) – FINAL REPORT

- 18.0 The Committee received a final report for consideration from the Working Group on Common Assessment Scale (CAS).

(copy filed as UGC/110311/015)

- 18.1 The Committee requested that a statement/recommendation be included to address how Schools/Disciplines round up or round down their mark on an element of assessment when mapping on to the alphanumeric grade. The Committee agreed that a common approach would be helpful and asked that this be fed back to the Working Group.

Action: Professor McGeorge

- 18.2 In addition, a request was made to amend the wording used in the band descriptors for Fail (F1). It was felt that the current '*compensatory credits*' text was perhaps misleading to both staff and students. The Committee noted that Professor Long would provide alternative wording to the Working Group.

Action: Professor Long

RELEASING SUB-COMPONENT MARKS FOR EXAMS

- 19.0 The Committee noted the request to allow Schools to release the sub-component marks for exams to students.

- 19.1 The Committee noted that, at present, the University has a policy to not release sub-component marks, and as a result students do not know how their exam is broken down. It is hoped that this policy could be changed/removed to allow Schools to release this information to students.

- 19.2 The Committee noted that the University currently does not have the facility to hold this breakdown of information in the Student Record System, however with the proposed introduction of a new Student Record System via the University Resource Project (URP) that this facility may, in time, become available.

- 19.3 The Committee endorsed the proposal and asked that the inclusion of such information on student transcripts is a recommendation of the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) project. It was further noted that it would be put forward to UCTL and then Senate for final approval.

PROPOSAL TO REVIEW THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLIC-FACING DOCUMENTS FROM REGISTRY

- 20.0 The Convener requested that the Committee consider the proposal for Registry to review the language of their public-facing documents.

- 20.1 In an effort to address this problem, the Committee was informed that Registry is currently making changes to their public-facing documentation. Registry Officers are currently undertaking a review of the communication sent out to students over the summer months, in

the hope of making it more student-friendly. In addition the Committee noted that the Infohub website was an excellent example of student-friendly terminology.

- 20.2 The Committee acknowledged that this was a long term rolling process and welcomed any changes being made.

PEER MENTORING

- 21.0 The Committee noted a paper outlining the proposal to pilot a peer mentoring scheme within the School of Medical Sciences with a view for implementation in September 2011.

(copy filed as UGC/110311/016)

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 22.0 The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held as follows:

Friday 13 May 2011 at 2.00pm in the Court Room, University Office