

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2011

Present: Dr J Morrison, Dr P Davidson, Dr S Davies, Mr A Downie, Mrs E Clark, Professor A Hartley, Professor J King, Dr D McCausland, Dr A Macdonald, Dr J McDonald, Dr L Phillips, Dr J Perkins, Dr L Philips, with Miss Alyson Hogg (Clerk) in attendance.

Apologies: Ms J Bjorkqvist, Professor M Cotter, Dr G Gordon, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr G McEwan, Professor P McGeorge, Professor R Patey, Dr R Vij, Dr R Wells.

MINUTES

9.0 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2011, subject to two amendments as follows:

9.1 Item 2.7 of the previous minute refers. The minute outlines the Committee's suggestion that the University to consider a variation of a 10-week term and the possibility of looking at the structure of the academic year more radically and the possibility of moving to two 5-week terms. Instead, this should state the possibility of moving to two 5-week terms in each half-session.

Action: Clerk

9.2 Item 5.6 of the previous minute refers. The minute outlines that the Committee agreed to the number of resit opportunities being reduced but further agreed that the concerns of the School of Medical Sciences should be clearly noted. Instead this should state 'The Committee agreed the number of resit opportunities should not be reduced without having firm numbers of how many students it would affect i.e. how many students would have been prevented from progressing by this new rule if it had applied in the last couple of years?'

Action: Clerk

(copy filed as UGC/091211/007)

ADVANCED ENTRY

10.0 The Committee received a paper outlining advanced entry requirements and recommending that the University give consideration to the development of various advanced entry routes.

(copy filed as UGC/091211/008)

10.1 In discussing the above, the Committee noted that the University already offers advanced entry to suitably qualified applicants, however to date the number of students opting for advanced entry into year two has been relatively small.

10.2 The Committee acknowledged that changes in the senior phase teaching in Scotland and fees for RUK students may lead to increased demand for Advanced Entry. Following discussion, the Committee agreed that a number of issues, such as selection, progression and support offered to advanced entry students, must be considered if the quality of the teaching experience is to be maintained for all students.

10.3 Within the University, the Committee noted that the College of Arts and Social Sciences often have problems with students who have been given advanced entry to Level 2 to some of their degree programmes. The Committee further noted that while these students were given advanced entry to Level 2 of their chosen discipline e.g. Management Studies, it is not always clear that the requirements also ensure that students have direct entry to other Level 2 courses.

10.4 Following lengthy discussions, the Committee agreed that both the College of Life Sciences and Medicine (CLSM) and College of Physical Sciences (COPS) do not appear to have as big a problem/issue with this as the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS). The Committee agreed that this was, more than likely, due to the nature of their degree programmes and specifically because cognate groups were not as easily identified for programmes within these Colleges.

10.5 In terms of moving forward, the Committee agreed that CASS should follow the process outlined in the recommendations i.e. identify cognate groups of programmes that have a clearly defined set of Advanced Level qualifications that guarantee entry to all Level 2 courses associated with those

programmes. Should Disciplines wish to interview students, the Committee agreed that this was a decision which could be made individually by each Discipline concerned. However, in considering this the Committee agreed that interviewing every student could be logistically problematic for Disciplines.

- 10.6 Furthermore, when dealing with advanced entry students, the Committee agreed that the University must set out clearly to students exactly what is expected of them. This would not have to be in the format of an interview instead clear guidance on what to expect and the options available to them would be sufficient. In discussing this, the Committee also agreed that support must be given to advanced entry students including the recommendation for enhanced induction processes.
- 10.7 In addition, the Committee agreed that when dealing with cross-College programmes such as BSc/MA Psychology and BSc/MA Geography these would be best dealt with at degree programme/discipline level instead of at College level.
- 10.8 Finally, the Committee agreed that should the recommendations be approved by UCTL they be passed down to the College Teaching and Learning Committees for more detailed discussion.

STUDENT SURVEYS – NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2012

- 11.0 The Committee received a paper from Policy, Planning and Governance outlining the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) for 2011.
(copy filed as UGC/091211/009a)
- 11.1 The Committee were asked to consider ways to help promote NSS for 2012. Following general discussion, members suggested that the institutional deadline for the survey could be amended slightly.
- 11.2 The Committee noted that many final year students in the School of Education are out on placement when the current deadline ends (currently end of March). However, the Committee noted that the NSS officially runs from the end of January to the end of April and that extending the deadline by a few weeks may help increase the number of students overall completing the survey.
- 11.3 In discussing ways in which to help promote the NSS, the Committee queried exactly how Ipsos Mori worked within the institution and specifically how it targeted the students. The Committee requested that someone from Policy Planning and Governance be invited to update and brief the Committee on the overall NSS process.

Action: Clerk

STUDENT SURVEYS – INSTITUTIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

- 12.0 The Committee received a paper outlining proposals for the institution to run an annual NSS-like survey on undergraduate students across all years (except final year students).
(copy filed as UGC/091211/009b)
- 12.1 The Committee noted that final year students would continue to complete the NSS survey only. The Committee also noted that the proposed institutional survey would commence in parallel with the NSS, be administered centrally and would make use of the online course evaluation software through *MyAberdeen*.
- 12.2 The Committee further noted that the proposed format of the Institutional Student Survey (ISS) would not be dissimilar to the NSS survey, to allow students to get used to the format and styles of questions etc. The hope is that by the time students come to completing the NSS survey, in their final year, they would be used to the format and style and be able to complete it more fully than in previous years.
- 12.3 Following general discussion, mostly positive comments were received from the Committee regarding the proposal for an Institutional Student Survey. Members agreed that it would be good for the University to be able to provide comparable data across all years of study, as well as providing a better opportunity for Schools and Colleges to follow up on specific responses from students. The Committee also agreed that retrieving/obtaining information from Levels 1, 2 and 3 students could only benefit the University. The Committee further agreed it would help address problems earlier on in students' studies, which in turn would help increase the overall student experience.

- 12.4 In discussing the proposal the Committee noted that some members were concerned that students would view the ISS as yet another survey, which may result in survey fatigue and a poorer response rate.
- 12.5 However, despite reservations from some members, the Committee agreed that if this proposal was to go ahead a review would have to be conducted on the current surveys used throughout the institution and their timelines. The Committee agreed that this would go some way to helping address the survey fatigue concern.

ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE

- 13.0 The Committee received a paper outlining a pilot scheme for an Academic Writing Course with the Schools of Education and Law.
(copy filed as UGC/091211/010)
- 13.1 The Committee noted that the course had been piloted with all Level 1 entrants from within the two Schools. The course involved students completing a set of tests online via *MyAberdeen* and students were also able to access their results and feedback in *MyAberdeen*.
- 13.2 The Committee noted that, although there were a few glitches to begin with, the student engagement with this course had been extremely impressive. Although not credit-bearing, the Committee agreed that one of the main aims of providing this course was to flag up to students that academic writing was something that the University took extremely seriously.
- 13.3 The Committee noted that a full evaluation of the pilot was currently being undertaken by the Centre for Learning and Teaching. The Committee requested that, once the final report was produced, consideration be given to rolling the course out to other Schools/Colleges as an example of good/best practice.

PROGRAMME ADVISORY BOARDS – UPDATE

- 14.0 The Committee were briefed/updated on the progress with Programme Advisory Boards.
- 14.1 The Committee noted that all three Colleges had been asked to create Programme Advisory Boards (PABs). The College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) has a total of three boards; one for the School of Law, School of Education and one to cover all other Schools within CASS. The College of Life Sciences and Medicine have agreed to arrange PABs at School level and the College of Physical Science has already set up PABs for Chemistry, Computing Science, Maths and Physics. The Committee noted that Dr Richard Wells, Director of Teaching and Learning for the College of Physical Sciences, was in the process of following up with Geosciences and Engineering.
- 14.2 The Committee noted the aim of Programme Advisory Boards is to increase and strengthen the links between Schools and potential future employers of students. The boards are also there to review graduation destination statistics/data, employability and co-curricular activities; however some boards may choose to review other aspects of students' studies.
- 14.3 The Committee further noted that there was a minimum requirement for each Programme Advisory Boards to meet at least once a year.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 15.0 The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held as follows:
Friday 30 March 2012 at 2.00pm in the Committee Room 2, University Office.