

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2012

Present: Dr J Morrison (Convener), Ms T Birley, Mrs C Cameron, Dr S Davies, Dr G Gordon, Dr A Jenkinson, Professor P McGeorge, Dr J Perkins, Dr G M McEwan, Professor L Phillips, M Pinard, Dr R Wells, Mrs A Caldwell-Nichols (Clerk), Miss E Hay (Registry)

Apologies: Dr R Bernard, Ms J Bjorkqvist, E Clark, Dr P Davidson, Mr A Downie, Professor A Hartley, Professor J King, Dr A Macdonald, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr J Mastoff, Dr D McCausland, Dr J McDonald, Dr R Patey, Dr R Vij

MINUTES

16.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 9 December 2011, subject to one update as follows:

16.2 Item 13.3 of the minute refers; 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.

Clerk's note: The evaluation has since taken place and the process was successful. The feedback received was positive and useful and as a result the course is now being rolled out across CASS.

Update on Key Information Sets (KIS)

(oral item)

17.1 The Committee received an oral update on Key Information Sets

17.2 The Committee discussed whether such data could potentially see a move away from the spirit of CREF as students could base course choices on data given to them on the most popular course choices. It was clarified that this detailed level of data would not be made available to students.

17.3 The Committee acknowledged the importance of information fed into SENAS forms, as this is where a substantial amount of information is gathered from. A case in point -was noted as the average contact hours for students' in the writing up stage of their thesis. There was -consensus that this is an area where more detailed information should appear in the catalogue of courses.

17.4 The Committee raised concerns over the detail included in the data. There was in depth discussion over categories including, fieldwork, placements and more specifically the definition of 'practical exercises'. There was concern raised that what the University would describe as a 'practical', KIS would not consider this in the statistics, and this would actually be considered as continuous assessment. The Committee noted concern that presentations are considered practical exercises, and the point was raised that a situation may arise where Arts degrees have more practical weighted statistics than science degrees.

17.5 In addition to concerns about comparisons between Arts and Science based degrees, the committee also questioned how the University would compare to English institutions. The Scottish universities flexible approach to degree programmes is considered a positive difference between the two; however the Committee were keen to question whether this flexibility would be represented positively or negatively in the KIS to perspective parents / students. The Committee was informed that this issue was being discussed with other Scottish institutions.

17.6 The categorising of Joint Degrees compared to Single Honours degrees was explained to the Committee, along with the different KIS types.

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

(copy filed as UGC/300312/12)

- 18.1 The Committee reviewed a paper proposing a new procedure for the submission and approval of collaborative teaching partnerships proposals.
- 18.2 It was noted that this paper had already been to the UCTL and UMG, with the intention that it would go to Senate in May 2012.
- 18.3 The Committee noted that the procedures that are currently in place are heavily bureaucratic and complex.
- 18.4 The Committee asked if it was a University of Aberdeen degree that was awarded under the terms of these agreements. The variety of degrees offered was outlined to the Committee, including Joint and Dual degrees.
- 18.5 The Committee raised the issue of Academic appeals for these students and were informed that these details are outlined in the agreement. As such procedures do vary. On a similar issue there was a discussion about how much support and involvement the Students' Association is able to provide to these students. It was clarified, that when these students are studying at the University of Aberdeen they are to be considered the same as other registered students and are therefore eligible for equal support.

PERSONAL TUTORS

(copy filed as UGC/300312/13)

- 19.1 The Committee considered a paper outlining the University's draft Strategic Plan explaining the anticipated role of a Personal Tutor in place of the current Adviser of Study.
- 19.2 It was noted that this paper had already been to the UCTL, with the intention that it would go to Senate in May 2012.
- 19.3 The issue of students not being on the same site as their personal tutor and students not being willing to travel was raised for the committee to consider. It was duly noted; however there was a feeling that the University can ensure that the facility is put in place, however students cannot be forced to use it.
- 19.4 A representative from the Psychology department raised the issue of the figures presented in the paper, as they were felt to indicate a much lower number of advisees than what the true number in that specific school. This point was taken on board, and it was suggested the reduced numbers could be as a result of joint degree programmes where students may be advised by members of the another discipline.
- 19.5 It was confirmed that it was not feasible for the new process to be implemented for September 2012; with the earliest implementation date being 2013/14. This date would allow for the time to iron out any potential problems ahead of its introduction.
- 19.6 Discussions continued as to whether there could be any improvements made to the current system, ahead of the full introduction of personal tutors. It was agreed that this was something to be revisited after the issue was passed through Senate.
- 19.6 The Committee was informed that the proposed personal tutor system had been designed so that students did not have to be assigned to a personal tutor within their own specific discipline. It was hoped that this would help equally disperse students among personal tutors, and keep individual tutor to student ratios down.

SCHOOL RETENTION ACTION PLANS

(copy filed as UGC/300312/14)

- 20.1 The Committee received a paper detailing the actions proposed by Schools to mitigate the non-continuation rates of full-time undergraduate students in their respective area of study.
- 20.2 A representative from Psychology informed the committee that the main difficulty faced with retention within the School of Psychology is that there are many students from 'non traditional' backgrounds, These students tend to have fewer qualifications, and are therefore more likely to leave.
- 20.3 After some discussion, there was a feeling it may be useful if these students were identified to schools or advisors so that they could be on a particular look out for students facing difficulties and perhaps intervene sooner. The Committee discussed whether or not this was possible, or if identifying these students in such a way could be seen as not treating them equally. There was a sense among Committee members that retention plans were intended to be more generic and 'across the board'.
- 20.4 The issue of whether it is in fact possible to pin point students who are more likely to leave was raised, as it was felt that students leave for a variety of reasons. The Committee was informed that the University is aware of specific groups of students who are more likely to leave University prematurely. Until now nothing has been done at an institutional level, but steps must be taken now to make the relevant people (i.e. advisers of study) aware of these groups.
- 20.5 There was an overall feeling that early monitoring will help with retention; students who are struggling will be picked up sooner and required to meet with a DUP etc, and there was a further suggestion that, in time, the new URP could be used in a positive way.
- 20.6 After reviewing the various school plans it was recognised that some plans were more concrete than others. The Committee agreed that Engineering in particular had more practical plans of action. It was felt that consideration had been made by Engineering of how results could be measured. It was also concluded that there should be a review in 6-8 months to monitor how effective these plans were.
- 20.7 The Committee were informed that £50,000 (this year only at present) had been assigned to retention activities and therefore it is important that there can be some tangible results to report back to prove that plans are not only in place, but are having a positive effect. This may result in more funding in future years. There was further discussion about the possibility that a bigger change to the cultural design of the University is what was needed, and that this would take longer than a year. The Committee agreed that there needs to be careful consideration that plans / support implementations are not too short term.
- 20.8 It was agreed that all retention plans should be circulated to all schools for review. It was felt that this would allow schoolsto see the suggestions put forward in view of sharing good practice. The deadline for this was given as the 18 May.

Action: Clerk

MONITORING UPDATE

(Oral update)

- 21.1 The Committee were given an oral update on the monitoring process.
- 21.2 The Committee were informed that the monitoring emails had been revised, that individual schools have improved the information available to students, and that a new C6 appeal form had been circulated to all schools. It was also explained that due to the new monitoring process, it was being kept under review and would be modified as and when necessary.
- 21.3 The Committee were informed that there had been an update on access to MyAberdeen and a student receiving a C6. Students will no longer be removed from MyAberdeen altogether, they will simply have the courses for which they have been monitored made unavailable to them.

- 21.4 The Committee raised concern over the wording of the emails, as it was felt that the wording was not clear. It was felt that students would not always continue reading to the point at which they were told what action to take. It was felt that students would sometimes contact course coordinators directly instead of following procedure. This was considered a particular problem if a member of staff was off for an extended amount of time. It was agreed that the wording of emails would be reviewed.

Action: Clerk

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

Friday 12 October 2012 at 2.00pm, venue to be confirmed