

Undergraduate Committee
(7 December 2012)

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 08 October 2012

Present: Dr R Wells (Convener), Mr D Auchie Mrs C Baverstock, Mrs J Bruce, Dr P Bishop, Miss J Bjorkvist, Dr D P Davidson, Miss M Dunn, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr M Law, Professor A Lumsden, Dr J McDonald, Professor P McGeorge (Items 2 and 4), Dr G Sharman, Dr D Wood, Miss E Hay (Registry) Miss E Webb (Clerk)

Apologies: Dr S Davies, Professor R Evans-Jones, Dr A Hartley, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr W D McCausland, Dr G McEwan, Dr R Miller, Dr R Patey, Dr J Perkins, Ms R Sandison, Dr R Vij

MINUTES

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 30 March 2012, subject to one typographical error.

(Copy filed as UG/081012/001)

REVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR

- 2.1 The Committee received an oral background on the paper. It was noted that the paper has been the product of a large working group considering the University's current model to that of other Higher Education Institutions' across the sector. The paper is currently being considered by Senior Management Team (SMT) and being taken to College Executives for discussions, led by Professor McGeorge.

(Copy filed as UG/081012/002)

- 2.2 The Committee was asked to consider two possible models which have been submitted for discussion and to consider the pedagogical reasons behind the proposed changes.

- 2.3 The Committee was informed that the University is now out of line with other Higher Education Institutes (HEI's) in Scotland.

- 2.4 The Committee was asked to consider the following negatives about our current model;

- A later summer Graduation officially prevents our students from entering the job market until after other graduates from other HEI's, therefore disadvantaging them.
- Exams after Christmas make it extremely difficult for staff to meet our own deadlines of providing feedback and exam results before the second half session commences.
- There is currently no formal induction for the new second semester starts.

- 2.5 The Committee raised several concerns regarding the difficulties of moving to a new teaching model. Issues arising included 6 week courses, delivering content in a

compressed timescale, notional teaching hours with regards to students and staff and the practical implications of implementation.

- 2.6 The Committee was assured that student contact hours would not decrease, and a structured revision week would ensure the realistic distribution of notional teaching hours. This must be adhered to provide competitive Key Information Set (KIS) data.
- 2.7 The Convener noted that the effect on teaching fellows should be considered.
- 2.8 The Committee was informed that the removal of several programmes with no students registered on them and a review of the teaching timetable, would remove certain timetabling restraints allowing more room for teaching hours to deliver the required content.
- 2.9 The Committee discussed the various options of addressing 6 week courses. Recommendations were made, and the Committee agreed that the situation could be addressed.
- 2.10 After some discussion it was recommended that the expected implementation time frame of 2014/2015 should be communicated to staff before the paper is passed to Senate for approval.
- 2.11 General discussions were had over how examinations are marked. The proposed change to the Academic Year mean that staff will have additional time to mark exams, during a time that they are not required to teach. However, there were discussions over the timetabling of larger exams, and the time required marking different categories of exams. It was agreed there should be further discussion on the provision of timetabling and marking exams.
- 2.12 Further discussions arose as to the necessity of an exam diet. This was revisited and discussed in more detail with regards to Item 5. See below.
- 2.13 SRAS noted the effect on their processes, and confirmed their ability to address any agreed change.
- 2.14 The Committee questioned the reason for a 3 week Easter Vacation. The Committee was informed of the necessity due to field work and formal assessment opportunities which are undertaken by certain Schools.
- 2.15 The Committee raised concerns over the general discussion on restructuring of the Academic Year, when Senate previously rejected plans and the discussions were put on hold. The Committee was informed, that since then other HEI's in Scotland have restructured the Academic Year, leaving Aberdeen as the only HEI with exams after Christmas. There have also been additional minor changes.
- 2.16 Overall the Committee had a positive outlook on the proposed changes to Academic Year.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) AND INSTITUTIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (ISS)

- 3.1 The Committee was asked to consider and discuss the results of the NSS and ISS survey.

(Copy filed as UG/081012/003)

- 3.2 The Convener brought to the Committees attention the improvement in the NSS results, however reiterated a general improvement across the entire sector.
- 3.3 The Convener praised the improvements in areas where the implementation process has been in a very short timescale. This was impressive and he is confident that this trend will continue.
- 3.4 The Committee discussed the issue of feedback. It was agreed that student's expectations needed to be managed more effectively with more detailed communication from staff on what constitutes feedback per course. The Committee agreed that it was reasonable for feedback to vary and cover a wide spectrum of actions, from a detailed written response, to oral feedback in a group environment, such as a tutorial, and that should be communicated to students. It was noted that some Schools provide feedback information in course guidebooks.
- 3.5 The Committee asked if there is University policy guide on what constitutes good feedback practice, and whether information on "feedback" could be documented and disseminated to students.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's Note: The Committee are reminded that the University's Feedback Framework is accessible [here](#).

- 3.6 There Committee raised concerns regarding how students participate in the NSS survey and how programmes are grouped together.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's Note: Emma Forster - Policy, Planning and Governance, has provided the following information with regards to the NSS Survey;

- 1) No-one will be questioned twice.**
- 2) The NSS target population is extracted from our HESA return and provided to Ipsos-Mori.**
- 3) One aspect of the HESA return splits the population by JACS codes. Each University course (not programme) is assigned a JACS code at approval stage and therefore students will be split proportionately across more than one JACS code according to the make-up of their programme of study. This also addresses the issue of how we can have fractional respondents.**
- 4) Because JACS are sector-wide, this allows us to analyse our own performance in comparison with others**
- 5) The mapping of JACS code to Schools is not, and can never be, straightforward e.g. just because someone has a part-FTE under a chemistry JACS code, does not mean they will necessarily be chemistry graduates. However, to encourage returns and look at results it is helpful to link JACS codes to Schools, although this will probably work better in some areas than others.**

Please be reminded that the Survey is carried out by Ipsos-Mori on behalf of the UK funding councils, overseen by a HEFCE Project Board – The University as a single institution has a very limited input into the operational detail of the survey.

- 3.7 The Committee asked whether the results of the ISS would be actioned. The Convener noted this and thanked the efforts of those involved in producing the ISS.

COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE AND UNDERGRADUATE GRADE

- 4.1 Professor McGeorge introduced the paper and provided background information to the Committee. The Committee was asked to discuss the paper.
(Copy filed as UG/081012/004a and UG/081012/004b)
- 4.2 The Committee asked for clarification that the numerical value would appear alongside a written Degree Classification. It was confirmed that this would be the case, and this would appear on the new HEAR transcripts.
- 4.3 The Committee asked about an implementation time scale, and it was suggested that the proposed new Grade Spectrum would be introduced at the start of the following Academic Year. The Committee was assured that students crossing two systems, would not be disadvantaged and would have their grades compared against both models, with a final result being awarded under the system which provided the greater advantage.
- 4.3 It was explained to the Committee that the proposed new Grade Spectrum was a way of reflecting higher achieving students throughout their whole Academic career at University. This will allow a comparison between students which is similar to that which a Grade Point Average system allows. It was noted an official name for the new system has not been decided.
- 4.4 The Committee raised concerns regarding the implementation of the system, especially concerning the IT aspect. The Committee was informed that DIT has currently agreed that they will be able to provide support to implement the new system, without the need for reliance upon OneSource.
- 4.5 The Committee raised concerns regarding the fact that different Schools have different methods of calculating honours classifications. The Committee was informed that it was expected that MyAberdeen would provide a function to allow this, and there would be support centrally to prevent multiple databases.

STUDENT BEHAVIOURS IN EXAMS

- 5.1 The Committee considered a paper which collated feedback from Colleges concerning the major problems being faced in exam diets.
(Copy filed as UG/08
- 5.2 The Committee discussed the concerns over the role of the senior invigilators. It was agreed that careful consideration must be given to who is appointed as Senior Invigilator to ensure that they have the relevant experience and knowledge to effectively conduct their job. The Committee noted that the concept of employing professional invigilators is being considered, however recognised there was significant cost associated.
- 5.3 The Committee proceeded to discuss the need for an exam diet, and whether improvements could be made to altering the way in which students are assessed. The Committee noted that various forms of continuous assessment are a desirable method of examination for many staff and students.

- 5.4 The Committee recognised the time and effort which went into providing disability provisions and raised concerns over how disability provisions would be effectively implemented across various methods of continuous assessment.
- 5.5 The Committee heard how the School of Education address the above concern by using built in proof reading facilities, extensions to deadlines and additional Turnitin submissions.
- 5.6 The Committee discussed that the SQA must face similar problems regarding the use of smart phones and that there use was simply not tolerated. The Committee noted that the University's attitude towards allowing the use of smart phones as a clock, was very lax compared to that of other institutions. It was suggested more clocks are purchased, and a stricter approach is taken towards the use of smart phones.

Action: Clerk

Clerk Note: Further investigation into the exams conditions enforced in other Further Education and Higher Education's Institutes to follow.