

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE (TAUGHT)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING 2 AUGUST 2018

Present: Prof E Pavlovskaja (Convenor), Prof G Nixon, Dr A Bryzgel, Dr D MacCallum, Dr N Beacham, Dr A Cleland, Ms Janet MacKay with Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Dr Z McKellar and Dr C Calder in attendance.

Apologies: Prof C Kee, Mr R Williams, Dr M Ehrenschtendner, Prof J Nelson, Dr D Muirhead, Dr A McKinnon, Mrs D Connolly

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 16 March 2018

Copy filed as PGC/020818/031

1. In regard to item 11.6, the Committee noted that the SENAS process had been replaced by the Curriculum Management System. The Committee recommended removing the mention of SENAS and replacing with a statement confirming that QAC approve course and programme proposals.

MATTERS ARISING

- 2.1 The Committee raised the point that no further information had been received in follow-up to the email sent out by the Convenor following the discussion noted under section 3.6. The Committee felt that further guidance on the subject of external examiners should have been provided following the strikes.
- 2.2 Further to the discussion regarding PGT promotion week in the previous meeting, the Convenor stated that this would be revisited when planning ahead for future events. It was raised that the Library had not been made aware that the promotion week was taking place. The Convenor recognised that not all potential advertising resources had been used and that in future the library and e-zine could be better utilised.
- 2.3 The review of the analysis on best practice was recorded as complete and the Committee was thanked for their help with this.
- 2.4 The Convenor stated that, following the discussion at the previous meeting, the Honours Classification Method had been picked up and approved by Senate and no further action was required.
- 2.5 It was noted that feedback had not been received on how to manage overall grade calculations after a request noted in section 11.6 of the minutes of the previous meeting.

REMIT AND COMPOSITION FOR 2018/19

- 3.1 The Convenor requested that Schools or areas are listed as well as the name of the representative, in the format "Representative of School of X" followed by the name.
- 3.2 Clarification was sought on the mention of the PGR remit as the Committee does not specifically cover PGR students. It was suggested that this may be changed to reflect the PG Taught Experience. The Clerk noted that reference to Taught PG students could be added in a few places and that PGT and PGR students should be separated in the final bullet point of the discussed document.
- 3.4 The Committee was informed that the PGR and PGT surveys did not run this year but in-house surveys were conducted instead. It was suggested that reference to this in the document could be changed to reflect generic student-relevant surveys.
- 3.5 The Committee agreed that the document should be amended and circulated by email. As the Committee was not quorate it was not possible to approve the document subject to the amendments taking place. The amended document will be circulated with the minutes of the meeting in order to allow all members to review the changes.

ACTION: CLERK; ALL MEMBERS

CONVENOR'S REMARKS

- 4 The Convenor advised that there were no additional matters to note.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

Copy filed as PGC/020818/033

- 5.1 The Convenor informed the Committee that the document was scheduled to be submitted for printing on 10 August 2018 so no amendments could be made, but that discussions could be held on how the document would be used going forward. It was recognised that there was a lot of information in the document about expected challenges and how they might be addressed so the Convenor invited the Committee to discuss this.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed the subject of online submissions and it was stated that this often led to a faster marking turnaround. It was noted that some Schools are still building experience in using online submissions, but the Committee recognised that this method was often more accessible for students as they can submit at times that suit them and don't need to travel to campus to do so.
- 5.3 The Committee discussed the subject of Programme Coordinators acting as Personal Tutors for PGT students. Committee members were informed that the School of Psychology had trialed a system where staff members took on groups of approximately ten students each. In doing so it was identified that this approach was necessary due to the types of issues that arose over the students' course of study. Going forward, the School hopes that three staff members can thus be removed from UG Personal Tutor responsibilities to direct their attention exclusively toward PGT students instead. It was discussed that students may be more likely to discuss matters with a separate personal tutor than their Programme Coordinator. The trial will be reviewed more formally in due course.
- 5.4 Committee members recognised that PGT issues are often very different to UG student needs. Additionally, it was stated that PGT students deserve the same student experience as UG students. It was noted that with the increasing numbers of PGT students due to enter study with the University, support provision would need to be increased to reflect this. The Committee felt that this was particularly important given that the number of programmes were not increasing substantially, but rather the size of the cohorts within each programme. The Committee stated that having dedicated PGT Personal Tutors would be better for the student experience than staff dividing themselves between UG and PGT students.
- 5.5 The Committee noted that PGT programmes are intense and time-sensitive, and that students often have different study concerns from UG students, therefore pastoral support from day one is indicated.
- 5.6 The Committee were informed that students on Music programmes organise meet-ups and activities on a weekly basis without contact from academic staff, and find this to be a beneficial means of support. It was suggested that this should be used as an example of best practice and that this could perhaps be encouraged by AUSA. It was also noted that students in single cohorts tended to engage with each other better than in programmes where cohorts were mixed.
- 5.7 The Committee agreed that an item on Personal Tutors should be brought back for discussion at the next meeting with the full Committee. In the interim, the School of Psychology will attempt to collate some formal feedback and liaise with the Clerk to allow a paper to be produced for discussion. It was also hoped that a response from the Personal Tutor system will have been received by that point regarding releasing staff members from UG Personal Tutor responsibilities in order to focus solely on PGT students. The Committee noted that it would be useful to discuss whether a response had been received or not.
- ACTION: CLERK; DR A CLELAND**
- 5.8 Members of the Committee queried section 2.57 of the document, specifically the timing of the MyAberdeen transformation. It was clarified that, while a smaller update took place this year, a more substantial update will take place in 2019 as stated in the document. Queries were raised regarding the timing of communication about using MyAberdeen during the switch-over process this year. Initial communication had stated that this would take place in August, and several staff member lost marking progress when the switch took place earlier than expected. While communication was released advising staff not to use MyAberdeen during the switch-over process, it was confirmed that this communication went out later and was received after the fact. It was confirmed that there will be a move toward all

Schools using the same VLE, including Medicine and Dentistry and that there may be additional training needs and a transition period for staff moving to new systems.

TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME END DATES

Oral Item

- 6.1 The Committee was informed that the Tier 4 team had raised an issue regarding submission dates for PGT dissertations and projects. Tier 4 visas are granted for twelve-month programmes but some submission dates are in July, with some discussion about potential June submission deadlines. As UKVI issue visas sponsored by the University of Aberdeen based on twelve-month programmes, the Committee were asked to discuss practices within their Schools and the implications of submission dates.
- 6.2 The Committee raised the additional concern that students may feel that they were not receiving the full experience when they had been offered a twelve-month programme but found it to end substantially earlier.
- 6.3 The Committee stated that their submission dates were generally dictated by the need to turn the marking around before the start of the new term in September. It was also mentioned that as intercalating students start in August this can create an urgency to have everything in place at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.4 The Committee were informed that some projects were starting substantially early and it was queried whether there was an expectation that students would work on these over Easter. It was clarified that students in some schools do not have the same length of time off at Easter as UG students, with this being reduced to a week in some cases.
- 6.5 The Committee generally agreed that there was a need to prepare for the next academic year and incoming students while holding exam boards, viva voce examinations and allowing for resubmissions where appropriate. Additionally, submission dates often had to allow for time for presentations in some Schools. It was clarified that the main issue is where results are coming through in July, and not where academic activity is ongoing after physical or online submission of the written project. While the Committee reported that their exam boards were mostly at the end of August or into September they raised the issue that students expect and sometimes need their marks at the earliest opportunity after submission. It was clarified that Registry only require final marks/classifications in October to allow preparation time for November graduations, therefore early submission of marks is not a Registry issue but is, however, a Tier 4 issue.
- 6.6 The Committee queried the viewpoint of QAC on the issue and it was confirmed that QAC would not see when submissions are made, but rather they would have agreed timelines at the implementation of the course or programme.
- 6.7 The Committee was in general agreement that, while programmes are expected to run for twelve months, the issues discussed often dictated that everything needs to be turned around in a shorter period. The Committee queried how other HEIs run their PGT programmes but it was believed that the standard is comparable.
- 6.8 All Committee members in attendance indicated that their submission dates were towards the end of July or the first half of August. The Committee agreed that this was an acceptable submission point and that any earlier was problematic and processes must be mindful of facilitating intercalating students. It was agreed that the Schools not represented at the meeting would also need to consider the matter of submission dates. It was stated that a paper may be presented for discussion if necessary, however it was hoped that this could be achieved via email distribution and discussion.

ACTION: CLERK

OTHER BUSINESS

- 7.1 The Committee were informed that the PGT survey had been open since 4 July 2018 and the response rate to date was 7%.
- 7.2 While students are contacted directly about the PGT survey, the Committee were asked to flag this up to students as this is a good opportunity to receive feedback from students. It was confirmed that information regarding the survey had been released to staff via the e-zine. It was agreed that Dr Calder would email

the whole Committee regarding the survey, and Committee Members were encouraged to highlight this information to colleagues.

ACTION: DR C CALDER

- 7.3 The Committee were informed that last year's response rate was 25% (718 responses) and that five reminders had been sent while the survey was open. Two reminders had been sent to date.
- 7.4 To date, a closing date for the survey had not been set and the Committee were informed that this will be determined by the response rate and student activity, but could be the end of August or the beginning of September with three more reminders planned.
- 7.5 The Committee were informed that a query had been received from a student regarding the anonymity of the survey. It was clarified that the survey is not fully anonymous but that it was important to stress to students that it was confidential in order to encourage honest feedback.
- 7.6 The Committee were informed that, with the University currently pushing online programmes, the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture were due to release a new Translation Studies programme, however problems with Curriculum Management prevented marketing. The Clerk confirmed that once business cases for programmes are confirmed, Schools are free to market the programme and that confirmation of course codes is not required.
- 7.7 It was noted that some Schools have had some difficulties in using the Curriculum Management System but there are planned improvements to be introduced over the next few months.