

15 January 2018

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE (TAUGHT)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING 15 January 2018**

Present: Prof C Kee (Convenor), Prof E Pavlovskaja (Co-convenor), Dr A Bryzgel, Dr M Ehrenschwendtner, Dr D Maccallum, Prof J Masthoff, Dr A McKinnon, Dr D Muirhead, Prof J Nelson, Ms S Paterson, Ms K Paterson-Hunter, Mr R Williams, Dr S Woodin with Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Ms Z Mckellar, Dr T Baker, Dr C Calder, Dr A Yule and N Kinchen-Williams in attendance.

Apologies: Dr N Beacham, Mr K Oliver

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 1 NOVEMBER 2017**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/015*

1. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting on 1 November 2017.

**MATTERS ARISING**

2. The Convenor confirmed that all actions had been taken.

**INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/016*

- 3.1 The committee discussed the proposals regarding the institutional framework for feedback on assessment. Dr Tim Baker attended the meeting and gave the Committee an overview of the paper, stating that the aim was to raise awareness of the framework through committees before it is presented to Senate. It was noted that the framework would then be available online for students and staff.
- 3.2 The Committee queried the wording of the paper with regard to feedback timing, particularly where "excluding vacations" was referenced as the University only classes the December closure as vacation time. It was confirmed that vacation time referred to student vacations during term-time in December and at Easter.
- 3.3 The Committee raised some concerns about whether the requirement to provide feedback would extend to written examinations. Some Committee members reported providing general feedback to students but this varied between Schools and specific feedback on written examinations was currently not routinely provided to all students.
- 3.4 The Committee queried whether there would be anything in the framework on students' responsibilities as there was general consensus that students often do not understand what constitutes feedback. It was confirmed that this will not be covered specifically as it is in the student partnership agreement.
- 3.5 The Committee expressed some concern over monitoring timescales for feedback. It was generally agreed that penalties for not adhering to guidelines may not be appropriate due to factors such as student numbers and/or capacity but agreed that a form of monitoring would be useful as this information was helpful for reports. It was generally agreed that Schools would be responsible for monitoring the timely return of feedback.
- 3.6 The Committee raised the issue that students do not have a grasp on what constitutes "timely" feedback. It was stated that the eventual plan was to develop some online information that would be sent out to students before they join their programmes that would aim to convey this.
- 3.7 It was stated that the paper would now go to UCTL before being finalised for Senate. The Committee members were requested to share the paper in their respective schools and feed back to their School representative for the feedback task force or to Dr Tim Baker directly.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

15 January 2018

### **MYABERDEEN EXEMPLARY COURSE DESIGN**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/017*

- 4.1 The Committee discussed a proposed rubric for exemplary course design within MyAberdeen. Dr Andrew Yule attended the meeting and provided an introduction to the paper before inviting comments on a proposed rubric for exemplary course design within MyAberdeen.
- 4.2 The Committee agreed that the paper was useful for evaluation of current courses on MyAberdeen but queried whether it was about establishing and promoting best practice or if the aim was to put forward courses for competition. It was confirmed that it was more about presenting an opportunity for reflection and discussion, although an eventual move towards institutional awards for a strong digital footprint could be beneficial.
- 4.3 The Committee queried whether there was capacity to run training for staff as, while there are already many cases of good myAberdeen usage, there was room for improvement. It was stated that it was more effective to be run on a School by School basis due to differing course structures/requirements. It was recommended that Schools should use their Digital Learning Representative as a point of contact.
- 4.4 The Committee agreed that it would be useful to see examples of good usage to use as a means of comparison. Some Committee members confirmed that interaction with previous demonstrations had been beneficial. It was stated that this information is available for anyone to access as required.
- 4.5 It was stated that Committee members should circulate this information around their respective Schools via the School Admin Officer to invite comment and feed back to Dr Andrew Yule.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

### **UPDATE FROM PGT STUDENT EXPERIENCE WORKING GROUP**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/018*

- 5.1 Prof Ekaterina Pavlovskaja provided an update from the working group. It was reported that the group met before Christmas to discuss what methods would be required to evaluate the taught postgraduate student experience. It was noted that the group were looking at a number of metrics, including distribution of awards (i.e. Distinctions, Merits, drop to Certificate/Diploma level), graduate destinations and surveys.
- 5.2 It was stated that the group will meet again w/c 15 January 2018 with a member of the Careers Service attending to discuss, amongst other factors, graduate destinations.
- 5.3 It was noted that the results of last year's PTES survey were distributed to Schools before Christmas. Some members felt that the students' comments they had received through the survey were useful. Some Committee members felt that the results reinforced what they were already aware of within their disciplines, while others felt that there was some discrepancy between these results and those obtained from SCEF forms and SSLC meetings. It was suggested that this may be due to low response rate.
- 5.4 It was noted that the PTES survey closed in June meaning that students completed the survey before carrying out work on dissertations or projects, which could influence results. It was also noted that the timing of the survey was dictated by the Higher Education Academy, who ran the survey.
- 5.5 Prof Pavlovskaja requested that, if members had ideas about the potential metrics that should be used for evaluating PGT student experience, they should return comments to the Clerk for consideration by the working group.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

- 5.6 It was agreed that the Schools would further analyse the data and comments from the 2017 PTES survey results and prepare a response or plan of action for the next meeting.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

15 January 2018

## **UPDATE TO CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/019*

- 6.1 The Committee discussed proposed changes to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) relating to treatment of suspected offences of plagiarism and their resolution at School level.
- 6.2 The Committee expressed some concern with the Stage 1 warning, in particular with the wording referring to penalties. It was felt that allowing students to resubmit without penalty could give students who were felt to have plagiarised an unfair advantage over those who had not. In particular the concern was raised that the rule may be inequitable for a student who had failed the assessment without plagiarising.
- 6.3 Some Committee members felt that Stage 1 was not needed, aside from cases with severe mitigating circumstances, and that the process should start from Stage 2. It was agreed that further clarification on what system to follow would be needed before the process can be broken down into these stages. It was confirmed that decisions on what stage to apply would be at the discretion of the School, depending on the severity of the case.
- 6.4 The Committee agreed that the concern over lack of penalties at Stage 1 should be fed back alongside concern that this provided an unfair advantage to students who were deemed to have plagiarised. Additionally, clarification needed to be given as to whether the changes applied to postgraduate research students. It was also felt that it should not be down to course coordinators or subsequent nominees to decide on Stage 1 action and, to ensure consistency and fairness, further consideration needed to be given as to who should assess the case. Finally, any further paper proposing changes should be presented as amendments to the Code to clarify and highlight new proposals.

## **LECTURE CAPTURE POLICY**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/020*

- 7.1 Committee discussed the updated version of the proposed lecture capture policy and supported evidence paper.
- 7.2 The Committee queried what teaching methods would be covered by this policy, such as seminars or practicals. It was agreed that teaching staff would be able to judge whether recording was possible or practical and that the opt out process should be followed.
- 7.3 The Committee raised some concerns regarding the wording on who can access recordings as it was stated that recordings would not be used in complaints or appraisals. While it was agreed that it was not appropriate to use them for performance review purposes there were possible occasions where a recording may be needed in light of a complaint. It was noted that whilst the policy prevented students from being able to use recordings as part of a complaint against a staff member, it did not prevent staff from using them against a student. Some Committee members felt that, if restrictions are to be applied, they should be the same for both students and staff.
- 7.4 It was noted that point 8 of the policy should be amended to “students normally registered on the course” in order to include research students not formally registered for a course but attending for training and who had been given access to the materials.

## **REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING**

*Copy filed as PGC/150118/021*

- 8.1 The Convenor informed the Committee that the working group would be looking at the approach towards mainstreaming accessibility provisions. The aim would be to assess whether they could be provided as a matter of course so as not to single students out.
- 8.2 It was stated that the working group would meet three times between January and April 2018 with a view to preparing a paper for consultation in September 2018.

15 January 2018

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 9.1 Dr McKinnon, on behalf of the School of Social Science raised the issue of the dissertation/project for January start students being undertaken and completed before delivery of all taught components of the programme. Dr McKinnon queried whether it would be possible for students on January start programmes to submit their dissertations in December, on completion of all taught elements. Committee members were asked to consider this issue and feed back to the Clerk with their views on the matter and also with their approach to dealing with dissertations/projects within a January start programme. It was agreed that the issue would be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

- 9.2 Some Committee members queried on the status of Quality Assurance Committee programme approvals. It was confirmed that approval was ongoing, but that Schools could go ahead and market programmes where business cases had been approved.