

## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE (TAUGHT)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING 16 MARCH 2018**

Present: Prof C Kee (Convenor), Dr N Beacham, Dr A Bryzgel, Dr M Ehrenschwendtner, Dr D Maccallum, Prof J Masthoff, Prof J Nelson, Ms S Paterson, Mr R Williams, Dr S Woodin with Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Ms Z McKellar, Dr C Calder and Ms N Kinchen-Williams in attendance.

Apologies: Dr D Muirhead, Prof E Pavlovskaja

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 15 JANUARY 2018**

*Copy filed as PGC/160318/022*

1. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting on 15 January 2018.

**MATTERS ARISING**

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

**CONVENOR'S REMARKS**

- 3.1 The Committee noted that the Postgraduate (Taught) Promotion Week went ahead as planned in the week beginning 12 March 2018.
- 3.2 Committee members reported varying success for their events throughout the week but overall the events were well received despite relatively low turnouts. A range of advertising methods were reported including social media, emails and MyAberdeen messages. It was agreed that students appeared to respond better to more personalised advertising by School.
- 3.3 It was raised that by running local events, which Schools advertised internally, students were not exposed to programmes from other disciplines in which they might be interested or better suited to. To address this, the Committee felt that a combination of School-based and centrally coordinated events throughout the year would be advisable.
- 3.4 The Convenor recommended that Committee members liaise with School contacts to discuss the week and look at plans for future events.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

- 3.5 The Committee raised the issue of ongoing industrial action and asked what was being done to minimise the impact for PGT students. The Convenor stated that there were ongoing discussions with Heads of Schools to discuss potential options as they need to establish how many courses have been affected and that the student experience is of prime importance.
- 3.6 The Committee drew attention to the issue of external examiners resigning their roles and asked for guidance on how to handle these occurrences. The Convenor confirmed that advice would be sought and fed back to the Committee on how any resignations should be managed, whether there was a standard response that should be used and on what amendments could be considered for the examination process.

**ACTION: CONVENOR**

**[Clerk's Note:** *Following the discussion regarding External Examiners, the Convenor sent an email on Monday 19 March 2018 to the Dean of Quality Assurance and the Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning to convey the concerns of the Committee and to ask for guidance as to how External Examiners should be replaced in the event that they resigned their posts.]*

**ENHANCEMENT LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW UPDATE**

- 4.1 The Convenor confirmed that panels were being arranged in Schools and encouraged Committee members to get involved with these if they have not already done so.
- 4.2 The Convenor stated that there would be a discussion at Senate on how student demographics had changed over time and on the need to contextualise teaching.

**PGT STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE**

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- 5.1 Dr C Calder informed the Committee that the feedback supplied by each School was useful in showing what aspects of the survey are important as a survey to replace the HEA survey was currently being constructed.
- 5.2 The Committee queried the proposal to run the 2018 taught Postgraduate student experience survey between mid-July and August. The Committee asked whether there was a possibility of running the PTES survey at different times depending on the School as there are often conflicts with elements of certain programmes. It was confirmed that, while there was no restriction, this was a question of resource as it would involve running the survey and processing data multiple times. Instead it was discussed as to how communication and promotion of the survey might be improved to help address some of the issues raised.
- 5.3 Committee members queried whether evaluating student experience specifically required a central survey. Other methods of collecting data locally within School was discussed, but it was confirmed that it is necessary to have a centralised method of data collection but others could be used by Schools throughout the year as necessary.

**TIMING OF DISSERTATION/PROJECT FOR JANUARY PGT PROGRAMMES**

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6. The Committee agreed that this matter would be discussed at the next meeting of the Postgraduate Committee (Taught).

**TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE) PROCEDURE**

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- 7.1 The Committee agreed that the submitted document was not as comprehensive as the existing policy. In particular, there was no reference to the Quality Code, and the document referred to offices that did not exist. Additionally, it implied a sub-committee of Senate, which was not the case, and implied removal of all other Committees from the process.
- 7.2 The Committee raised concerns that the current working group would be wholly responsible for the process and stated that this seemed like significant overreach.
- 7.3 The Committee agreed that the document did not demonstrate a clear of understanding of how income would be spent. It was noted that costs would need to be covered before any income was considered to be generated.
- 7.4 The Committee felt that the increased focus on the initiation of proposals by Schools was potentially restrictive. While the paper noted this as being desired in order to prevent the imposition of relationships upon Schools that were perhaps not appropriate, the Committee felt that this could prohibit positive ventures that had not come from an academic or did not have a research focus.
- 7.5 The Committee objected to the proposal that minutes of School discussions would go direct to Senate.
- 7.6 The Committee suggested that review of the existing procedural document would have been more appropriate than creation of a new one, and additions made where necessary. It was agreed that there needed to be explanation of changes made and why they were required.

- 7.7 The Committee agreed that the paper should be rejected in its current format and that the working group should work with the Dean for Quality Assurance on bringing forward any further proposals.

### **SFC ANALYSIS OF HEI ANNUAL RETURN**

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- 8.1 The Convenor stated that the analysis was based on Internal Teaching Reviews and was dependent on how many ITRs were submitted during the past 12 months.
- 8.2 The Convenor recommended that Committee members review the analysis to identify areas of best practice elsewhere that could be implemented, and that they bring those examples to their respective School Committees.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

### **HONOURS CLASSIFICATION METHOD: COMPARISON OF GS VS GPA**

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- 9.1 The Committee raised the issue of rounding marks on the Grade Spectrum but not on the Grade Point Average, meaning that a 17.5 on the GS is rounded up and becomes an A5 whereas on GPA it stays at 17.5.
- 9.2 The Committee stated that the paper was largely directed at UG where students are being assessed over two years, and may have begun their studies under one system before a new system was implemented. With PGT this is not the case.
- 9.3 It was stated that the dual system was originally brought in for two years and decisions need to be made on what the next steps should be as the dual system is admin-heavy. The Committee did agree that it was preferable to end the dual system.
- 9.4 The Convenor requested that Committee members discuss the issue within their Schools. It was noted that there would be a fuller proposal from the Dean for Quality Assurance in the future.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

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

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- 10.1 The Committee noted that the main revisions were to extend the penalties available to Schools when investigating allegations of plagiarism so that Schools could decide to impose a lesser penalty than failing the student if warranted.
- 10.2 The Committee confirmed that all issues raised previously had been addressed in the revisions and approved the proposed Code of Practice. .

### **DISCUSSION OF POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT REGULATION ISSUES IN THE BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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- 11.1 The Committee discussed the implications of monitoring for current block-teaching processes. It was stated that monitoring should not necessarily be limited to absences but rather should be used to ensure that students were on track to meet their learning outcomes. It was clarified that a student did not need to be automatically reinstated onto a course if they appealed within the monitoring deadlines in cases where they would be unable to meet the learning outcomes.
- 11.2 The Committee agreed that Schools would have to ensure that procedures are clearly set out in programme handbooks, outlining attendance requirements and that failure to attend a course would result in students being unable to meet learning outcomes and thus being withdrawn from a course. Following this, the student may be required to take the course again at a later date.

- 11.3 It was stated that, due to block-teaching, students arriving after the official start date of the programme may miss the opportunity to complete courses. This necessitated doing the course the following year which may have visa implications and, as such, it would be preferable not to allow later arrivals. The Convenor stated that it should be clarified which programmes would be problematic for late starts as it would be unfavourable to turn away students when their lateness was outside their control unless it would be impossible to make arrangements for them.
- 11.4 It was suggested that the Business School could make a case for late arrivals not to be permitted, provided they could demonstrate that they had explored all possible solutions. It was recommended that the Business School discuss this suggestion internally and, if it felt necessary to do so, seek the appropriate approval for late arrivals not to be permitted.
- 11.5 The Committee was asked to consider whether moving the exam diets would be feasible. It was stated that doing so might shorten the course which could have visa implications.
- 11.6 The Committee was asked for feedback on how to manage overall grade calculations, particularly in cases where students had not passed all elements of a course as the default setting for MyAberdeen was to take an average. It was stated that Schools could amend the default setting within MyAberdeen in order to dictate how the grade is calculated, but that information on minimum requirements must be displayed in the course catalogue after QAC approval.
- 11.6 The Committee was asked to review the paper and to feed back any comments to Russell Williams via email.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

#### **CHANGES TO DEGREE REGULATIONS – OMNIBUS**

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12. The Committee approved the changes to degree regulations for 2018/19.

#### **SECTOR UPDATES**

13. The Convenor requested that the Committee take note of the updates and discuss them within their respective Schools as appropriate.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**