

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE (TAUGHT)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING 27 FEBRUARY 2019

Present: Prof E Pavlovskaja (Convenor), Dr A Cleland, Dr P Hicks, Dr J Kedra, Dr D MacCallum, Dr A McKinnon, Dr D Muirhead, Prof G Nixon, Dr S Woodin, Prof P Ziegler, with Ms J Bray, Dr C Calder, Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Prof K Shennan and Dr H Sveinsdottir in attendance.

Apologies: Dr M Bodig, Dr SJ Kim, Dr A Sim

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 22 JANUARY 2019

Copy filed as PGC/270219/001

- 1.1 The Committee requested that minute 4.9 be added to note that there was an action on Committee members to discuss the draft papers on the borderline zone and abolishing rounding up of grades in their respective Schools and bring back the views to the next meeting.
- 1.2 The Committee requested that the would 'normally' be added to minute 4.6 as follows: '... PGT students normally had to achieve the project/dissertation at a certain level'.
- 1.3 The Committee requested that minute 4.8 be amended to clarify that the final course grade referred to the alphanumeric grade.
- 1.4 The Committee approved the minutes subject to the above change.

ACTION: CLERK

CONVENOR'S REMARKS

- 2.1 The Convenor informed the Committee about the new Online Education Management System that would go live on 11 March. The system would be used for students to purchase and register for individual courses, with it being expanded to include full degree programmes in the future.
- 2.2 The Convenor drew the Committee's attention to changes in SAAS funding. Online students were now eligible for SAAS funding, provided their programme was no more than double the length of the on campus equivalent.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENT TRANSITIONS

- 3.1 The Committee received an oral report from Ms Bray on the support provided by the Language Centre. The Committee noted that the issue of English Language training had been raised at the previous meeting under minute 6.2.
- 3.2 Ms Bray confirmed that the University requires PGT applicants to achieve a minimum IELTS score of 5.5 in speaking and listening. With some exceptions, any students undertaking the pre-session English language training course as a result of not meeting the overall IELTS score of 6.5 would have achieved that score already.
- 3.3 Ms Bray stated that the Language Centre had been working with Schools to provide students with practice on skills that were key to their degree programme. The Language Centre was keen for other Schools to approach them in order to establish what additional support could be provided.
- 3.4 Ms Bray stated that a key task for the Language Centre was to establish a tracking system to evaluate how effective the training has been.
- 3.5 The Language school was keen for any income it generates to be ring-fenced and used to support international students across the whole academic year.

- 3.6 Committee members were encouraged to liaise directly with Ms Bray in order to build a wish list of requirements from Schools. Ms Bray would attend the committee at its meeting in September to discuss what support the Language Centre could provide to students for the forthcoming academic year.

ACTION: SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

UPDATE ON PGT STUDENT EXPERIENCE PAPER

4. The Committee noted that data was currently being obtained and that the PGT student experience paper would be presented to the Committee on 1 May for consideration.

BORDERLINE ZONE AND CRITERIA/ABOLISHING ROUNDING UP OF GRADES

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- 5.1 The Committee discussed the proposals on the creation of a borderline zone for discretion and the abolishing of rounding up of course grades. Prof Shennan outlined that there was a need to establish consistency and transparency across the University in the use of discretion, and that the creation of a borderline zone would help achieve that.
- 5.2 The Committee was split between those who favoured a borderline zone of 0.5 and those who felt that a borderline zone was unnecessary in a GPA system. Some felt that there would always be situations where high achievement in all but one course would give grounds to potential discretion through the use of a borderline zone, while others felt that mitigation would normally have been done at course level and, therefore, not required when determining classification. Some felt there was no real justification for adjusting a classification as the GPA would accurately reflect what the student earned.
- 5.3 Some members felt that the use of a grade profile too closely resembled a Grade spectrum approach and that the University should be moving towards using the GPA only.
- 5.4 The Committee agreed that the rounding up of grades should be abolished. Prof Shennan confirmed that discussions had been ongoing regarding transcripts showing both the alphanumeric grade and the numerical grade.

POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT (PGT) PROGRAMME REVIEW – DRAFT REPORT

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- 6.1 The Committee discussed the draft report on the PGT Programme Review undertaken by Planning. Dr Sveinsdottir introduced the paper. The Committee noted that the review had been commissioned in response to challenging targets being set for PGT recruitment. The aim of the review was to analyse the current PGT population and establish the potential for growth, with particular regard to capitalising on gaps in the market not filled by the University's close competitors.
- 6.2 Dr Sveinsdottir outlined that growth had been positive over recent years but that the international fee paying portion remained smaller than the University's closest competitors. Dr Sveinsdottir also noted that flexibility in provision - online and blended programmes – had increased and should continue to do so.
- 6.3 It was noted that work would be done on establishing the true cost of running a PGT programme, which would help Schools to determine whether proposals for new programmes were sustainable.
- 6.4 It was noted that employability and links to industry were key factors for PGT applicants. The report would recommend a full review be undertaken to confirm what industry links Schools currently had so that these could be marketed effectively.
- 6.5 The Committee asked if there was resource to expand the marketing team. It was noted that marketing were represented on the review board and that the outcomes could be fed into the current review of marketing and recruitment.
- 6.6 The Committee noted that there would be a need to look at the resource required to deliver PGT programmes, including staffing and teaching facilities, and how much the University could grow before resource would need to be expanded.

- 6.7 It was asked whether a central PGT School had been a factor in the success of competitors. Dr Sveinsdottir agreed that this was a factor that should be looked at.
- 6.8 Committee members were asked to contact Dr Sveinsdottir with any specific comments on the draft report.

ACTION: COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR) DRAFT OUTCOME REPORT

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- 7.1 The Committee noted the draft outcome of the ELIR review.
- 7.2 The Convenor noted that a proposal would come to the Committee for discussion regarding the recommendation that External Examiners' reports be published.

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK – RESITS

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8. The Committee requested clarification on whether it was intended that PGT students would be able to take alternative courses to make up credits for courses that they have failed.

ACTION: CLERK