

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE (TAUGHT)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING 15 June 2020

Present: Kirsty Kiezebrink (Chair), Amy Bryzgel, Sandie Cleland, David Green, Peter Hicks, Jarosław Kędra, Dariya Koleva, Donna MacCallum, David McCausland, Graeme Nixon, Sandra Paterson, Anne-Michelle Slater, Robert Wishart, Sarah Woodin, Phil Ziegler with Tracey Innes, Natalie Kinchin-Williams, Janet Mackay, Kerry Harrison (Minute Secretary) and Robert Findlay (Clerk) in attendance.

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 6 MAY 2020

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- 1.1 It was noted that David McCausland had been omitted from the attendance list for the meeting. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2020, subject to this amendment.
- 1.2 In regard to minute 1.2, the Committee was informed that the paper on resits for PGT resits for projects and dissertation was approved by Senate.
- 1.3 In regard to minute 2.3, the Committee was advised that there were no plans to move the November graduation date. Concerns were raised about the impact this may have on the turnaround times for feedback and the Committee requested for this to be raised at the University Committee for Learning and Teaching. In addition, summer PGT resits were not expected to be hosted in the timeframe outlined in the revised assessment paper. Instead, timing could be determined by Schools as appropriate.
- 1.4 In regard to minute 6.2, it was confirmed that the No Detriment policy would apply for the 2019-2020 academic year and included summer 2020 courses but would not extend into the 2020-2021 academic year for courses beginning in September. The Committee requested a meeting with Kath Shennan for further guidance on how the policy should be implemented.

ACTION: CLERK

SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION TO BLENDED LEARNING

- 2.1 The Committee were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the University's approach to blended learning and explore their disciplines' approach with colleagues.
- 2.2 Concerns were raised by the Committee regarding workloads and teaching hours during blended learning to accommodate all students. It was noted that some staff had interpreted the guidance as an extension of core working hours. It was clarified that this was not the case and that the working day could be broken up to work around personal responsibilities.
- 2.3 The Committee acknowledged that a degree of flexibility will be required in programme structure and working hours in order to deliver synchronous teaching across time zones. The Committee would welcome clarity around synchronous teaching and the University's expectation.

PGT STUDENT SURVEY

- 3.1 Colin Calder provided the Committee with information about the PGT survey that would normally be released to students in early July and asked the Committee whether this would be useful this year due to COVID. He stated that there will be a survey to explore the blended learning model which has been implemented and SCEF would go ahead as normal, thus some student feedback will be available.
- 3.2 The Committee thought that although student feedback is always useful in some respect, this year will not be comparable to other years and therefore its use may be limited. The Committee agreed for Robert Findlay to gather and feedback information about the survey mentioned in 3.1 and then Committee members would consult colleagues and feed back to Robert.

ACTION: CLERK

CENTRALISED UNIVERISTY ORIENTATION

- 4.1 Tracey Innes provided the Committee with an overview of ongoing work for a centralised orientation programme for September to be delivered online. The Committee were broadly supportive of the proposal.
- 4.2 The Committee recommended tightening the wording of the paper to ensure it was clear that wholly online students were not transitioning to a blended learning model. It was also noted that this work could be used to enhance the online student experience.
- 4.3 The Committee noted that campuses other than Kings could be better represented in the proposals, for example including maps of the Foresterhill and Qatar campuses.
- 4.4 The Committee considered the idea of quizzes at the end of each orientation session. Clarity was sought for whether there is a 'safety net' for students who do not complete the quizzes.
- 4.5 The Committee emphasised the importance of the suitability of orientation materials for PGT students, acknowledging their experience and maturity. It was advised that Donna Maccallum was a representative on the PGT workstream exploring the orientation content and would be the Committees key contact for this work.
- 4.6 The Committee discussed the student landing page upon completion of the orientation. It was informed that the undergraduate orientation will lead into the Professional Skills non-credit bearing course and a similar course could be developed for PGT. The Committee were broadly supportive of updating the research ethics zero credit bearing course for PGT students for this purpose. The Committee requested that this course be housed in both Ultra and the original version of MyAberdeen, as not all Schools would be completing the transition to the new VLE in 2020/21.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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- 5.1 The Committee were supportive of the draft policy and procedures.
- 5.2 The Committee requested that the reference in the Summary to the No detriment policy continuing to be applied beyond 2019/20 be clarified.

ACTION: CLERK
- 5.2 The Committee noted that the University's counselling service was not legally able to provide support to students who are not based in the UK but was exploring ways to minimise the impact of this. The Committee was concerned about the impact this would have on students who study wholly online and would welcome development in light of COVID and blended learning.
- 5.3 The Chair informed the group of ongoing work to create a Technology Scholarship for students who did not have access or the means to purchase IT equipment for study use and alternative technology for software that is only available on campus. For the moment, the Hardship Fund was the appropriate avenue for this support.

REINSTATING C6/C7 FOR SUMMER 2020 TEACHING

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- 6.1 The Committee agreed that student monitoring should recommence for the summer sub-session.
- 6.2 The Committee recommended the wording was amended to make it clear that 'taught course' also referred to projects and dissertations.