

UNIVERSITY OF ABEREEN
POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING 23 JANUARY 2015

Present: Prof J Mastoff (Convenor), Dr C Bestwick, Prof B Connolly, Dr M Ehrenscheidtner, Dr P Fernandes, Dr H Hutchison, Dr C Kee, Dr D Maccallum, Dr A Mckinnon, Dr D Marais, Dr J Oliver, Ms S Paterson, Prof E Pavlovskaja, Prof Sahraie with Ms C Croydon, Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Mr M Roberts, Mrs K Smith, Mrs P Spence in attendance.

Apologies: Dr H Battu, Prof R Evans-Jones, Prof P Hannaford, Mr R Henthorn, Prof P McGeorge, Mrs K Slesser,

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING ON 6 OCTOBER 2014

11. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2014.
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MATTERS ARISING

- 12.1 The Committee noted that the mini SCEF mentioned in number 5.3 on the previous minutes had not been distributed.

ACTION: CLERK

UPDATE FROM RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT UNIT – ORAL UPDATE

- 13.1 The Committee noted that a consultation had been carried out to ascertain the professional development requirements of PgR students and staff members. This consultation highlighted university wide strategic issues. Short-term working groups chaired by VPs will be formed to address these issues.
- 13.2 New Supervisors training was ongoing; the training had been provided with the goal of improving completion rates.
- 13.3 CAD is developing online provision to work towards a blended learning approach to ethics training for the next academic year. Online training will be followed by face to face support provided at School level.

UPDATE FROM SCHOOL PG REPRESENTATIVES ON JANUARY 2015 PGT REGISTRATION

- 14.1 The Committee received feedback from school representatives on registration for January 2015.
- 14.2 The Committee noted that, in general, registration had gone well and overall student numbers were as expected.
- 14.3 The Committee discussed the structure of January start programmes and how this worked for some disciplines but not others.

PGT NEW PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT FOR 2016 (SCHOOL REPS) – ORAL UPDATE

- 15.1 The Committee noted that discussions were in early stages for new programmes for 2016. The Committee agreed that this would be considered in the coming weeks.
- 15.2 The Committee discussed various new programmes which would be introduced for 2015/16 including several new MLitt's from Language and Literature, a new Archaeology programme from Geosciences, two new history programmes and Process Safety from Engineering.

SUPPORT FOR DISTANCE LEARNING PG STUDENTS

- 16.1 The Committee discussed arrangements for PgR & PgT Distance Learning Students recognising they are two separate groups with different requirements.
- 16.2 The Committee noted that provision for distance learning is dealt with on a School by School basis resulting in no coherent plan. Education and Divinity are more experienced than some in this area so advised other Schools of the provision and service they provided. DHP stated that a large number of their PgR distance learners are located near a USA university so have access to library facilities. They tend to be aged 30-40 and very well motivated to succeed. This was not typical across some other schools.
- 16.3 The Committee discussed ways in which we can make students feel part of UoA. Services such as Skype were suggested and it was noted that although time zones are an issue that can be worked around sometimes problems with IT and infrastructure in other countries cannot be so easily remedied.
- 16.4 It was suggested that the University invest in a virtual community for both students on and off campus. It was suggested that we could utilise *MyAberdeen* further by creating organisations in order to fulfil this requirement.
- 16.5 It was discussed that it may be an advantage for each College to have a designated member of staff who is based in the eLearning Team. A College-funded post along these lines has already proven successful in CLSM.
- 16.6 The Committee discussed the current residency requirements for PgR students and the possibility of being more flexible as this may assist with student recruitment.

AT RISK MONITORING OF RESEARCH POSTGRADUATES

- 17.1 The Committee discussed the business case that had been presented to the One Source Project Board to introduce an electronic system for PgR monitoring. The current system was heavily paper based. The new system would help with tracking students' progress and tackling current lack of timely completion of monitoring reports. The new system would also make it possible to run progress and completion reports. .
- 17.2 The Committee discussed that while PgT students are monitored for attendance this was not done rigorously enough with PgR students. The Committee noted that this resulted in concerns regarding Tier 4 issues.
- 17.3 The Committee discussed that at present the emphasis is on Supervisors to highlight problems which arise, as they have a close working relationship with the student. The Committee agreed that Supervisors should pass concerns over attendance to the PgR Coordinator to discuss the appropriate action.
- 17.3 The Committee was split when discussing appropriate use of C6. Some Committee members felt it could be used as a deterrent and should be communicated clearly at induction while others felt it should be used as a last resort. The Committee was also split as some members felt too much emphasis was placed on attendance while the focus should be on progress. The

Committee also noted that the School of Social Science arranged a Progress Committee as soon as an issue is highlighted.

LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR MY ABERDEEN

- 18.1 The Committee discussed that marking through *MyAberdeen* was not user friendly and there are multiple ways to carry out the same task leading to confusion. This can result in students being given a numerical mark out of 22 rather than using the new CGS.
- 18.2 The Committee agreed that training from the *MyAberdeen* team had been excellent. However it was recognised that more resource needed to be invested in order to maintain a system that the University is becoming increasingly dependent upon.

CHANGES TO SENAS PROCESS

- 19 The Committee discussed the proposed changes to the SENAS process. The changes include removing steps to make the process more streamlined but it was felt that taking the college involvement out could lead to further problems. The main change would be that amendments with no timetabling issues would not need to be done within deadlines.
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REVIEW OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 20 The Committee noted the Review of Quality Enhancement Framework Consultation Process.
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UPDATE ON POSTGRADUATE FEE SUPPORT FROM SAAS FOR 2015/16

- 21.1 The Committee noted the changes to the PgT fee support for 2015/16.
- 21.2 SAAS has not invited any new programmes to apply to be eligible for SAAS funding for the last three years. The programmes they fund are not the same across different universities and there seems to be no criteria regarding what is eligible and what was not.
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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 22.1 The Committee felt the deadline for January 2015 exam results to be returned was not realistic and found this challenging due to external examiners. While the Committee understood the need for this deadline for undergraduates, as students may want to change courses, it was not felt necessary for Postgraduates.
ACTION: CLERK TO FEEDBACK
- 22.2 The Committee queried why Postgraduate students are required to pay for resits if they are out with the usual exam diets arranged by Registry.
- 22.3 The Committee noted that a paper presented to UCTL in May had stated that Registry would make exam arrangements providing they are held within the usual exam diets. Prof Masthoff will seek clarification of this.
ACTION: CHAIRPERSON