UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting Held on 12 November 2018

Present: Professor A Jenkinson (Convener), Dr T Baker, Dr E Bain, Dr J Borg-Bartlett, Professor A Denison, Ms I Drdakova (student member), Dr A Graham, Mr E Grant, Ms N Kinchin-Williams, Dr W T A Harrison, Dr G Hough, Professor W D McCausland, Professor S Davies, Dr T Mighall, Ms J Paneva (student member), Dr J Perkins, Professor M Pinard, Dr K Shennan, Dr A Widfeldt with Mrs P Rowand (Clerk).

Apologies: Dr J Bohan, Mrs T Innes, Professor G McEwan and Professor P McGeorge.

The Convener opened proceedings by welcoming Ms Drdakova, Ms N Kinchin-Williams and Ms Paneva to their first meeting of the Committee.

Minute of the Meeting Held on 18 September 2018
(copy filed as UG/121118/001)

1.1   The minute of the meeting held on 18 September 2018 was confirmed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

2.1   **Minute 1.2.1** The Convener advised that there were no further updates on the Mental Health Working Group other than to confirm that the Group's activities were ongoing, with two recent Health and Wellbeing days having taken place.

Action: Professor Jenkinson

2.2   **Minute 1.2.2** The Convener reported that, as yet, there was no update in regard to the possibility of establishing a teaching and learning fund to be dispersed to Schools.

Action: Professor Jenkinson

2.3   **Minute 1.2.3** The Convener advised members that information on whether there were any Capital Programme Management Committee reports on best use of physical space was still awaited.

Action: Professor Jenkinson

2.4   **Minute 6 – AOCB – Curriculum Management System**

2.4.1   A request had been made at the last meeting of the Committee for an update on the progress being made with regard to enhancements to the Curriculum Management System (CMS). The Convener reported that whilst the planned improvements to the CMS were being worked upon, Schools would be supported in submitting course and programme proposals for the 2019/20 academic year by a newly established Curriculum Team. The Curriculum Team (previously the MyCurriculum Team) under Mrs Pat Rowand's leadership would provide dedicated support for all curricular matters.

2.4.2   Schools had been notified that the process for course and programme approval/amendments would differ from last year in that the coding exercise was being separated from quality assurance. To this end, Schools had been asked to provide the Curriculum Team with a summary of the new courses they wished to offer plus any course amendments which would require a course code change by the planning cycle deadline of 30 November 2018. The Curriculum Team were to be responsible for entering the course and programme information into the CMS and, in order to

gather the required course/programme data, Schools had also been provided with templates which were to be completed and returned by 21 December 2018.

3   Committee Members Role Descriptors

(copy filed as UG/121118/002)

3.1   Referring to the circulated role descriptor for members of the Quality Assurance Committee, the Convener sought members' views on whether there would be merit in creating a similar document for members of the Undergraduate Committee. This, it was suggested, would be particularly helpful for new members of the Committee and would assist in providing clarity of the role for workload modelling purposes.

3.2   Following discussion it was agreed that there would be merit in drafting an Undergraduate Committee role descriptor covering the individual elements of the role, such as members:

- disseminating information/providing feedback to their home School
- representing the Committee on Working Groups, etc.

3.3   It was remitted to the Convener and the Clerk to prepare a draft role descriptor, using the Committee's remit as its basis, for consideration at a future meeting. Members were invited to submit any specific comments they wish to make to feed into the draft document by emailing the Clerk.

Action: All
Professor Jenkinson and Mrs Rowand

4   Update on Review of Policies and Practices for Inclusive Learning

(copy filed as UG/12118/003)

4.1   The Committee noted the Acting Head of Student Support's update on the institutional review of policies and practices for accessible and inclusive learning. It was noted that the review would be carried out by a short life Working Group comprising the Vice Principal Education (or deputy) and representatives from Schools, Student Support, the Disability Support Team, Registry, IT and Library staff and members of the Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity. It was also anticipated that forums and focus groups would be used to gain wider input from School staff and students.

4.2   The Committee's views were sought on how best to secure School representation on the Working Group.   The importance of having both the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees represented in the membership of the Working Group was stressed. To that end it was proposed that the membership of the Working Group should include one or two members of the Committee who would be responsible for circulating Working Group papers in advance of its meetings and for gathering the Undergraduate Committee's views on the issues under discussion. It was further suggested that there would be merit in drawing wider School representation from School Directors of Teaching and Learning, Disability Officers, Mental Health Champions, Administrative Officers and Senior Personal Tutors.

4.3   Professor Jenkinson undertook to give further thought to the Undergraduate Committee's representation on the Working Group and report back to the Committee in due course.

Action: Professor Jenkinson

5   Honours Weighting in Degree Classification/Borderlines Update

5.1   Professor Shennan informed members that following the last meeting of the Undergraduate Committee she had considered the suggestion that she separate out the two issues discussed in

the paper to create two separate papers - one on degree classification and the second on bordlerlines – and had decided against this approach meantime. Consequently, the paper, as presented to the Undergraduate Committee in November, would be considered by Senate at its December meeting. Taking into account the outcome of the discussions at the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees and Senate, the paper would be revised further, with concrete proposals being brought forward for Senate's approval in March. Professor Shennan assured members that both the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees would be given the opportunity to review and comment upon the revised paper (or papers) before the Senate debate. If approved, the proposals would come into effect for students entering honours in academic year 2019/20.

5.2   At its last meeting the Committee had been of the view that there was merit in creating two separate papers, one discussing degree classification and the second borderlines. Members were still of the view that this was the best approach going forward.

5.3   Committee members representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition sought assurances that the concerns they had raised in writing would be reflected in both the presentation being made to Senate and the paper being taken forward. Professor Shennan confirmed that the School's views had been taken into consideration when the paper was drafted. She impressed upon members that it would up to Senate to decide if there needed to be consistency of approach across the institution or if there was scope to allow deviation from the norm if a case were made.

6   Feedback from SCEF Working Group

6.1   Professor Shennan reported on the work which had been undertaken by the SCEF Working Group. The Group had now met on a number of occasions and had considered the reasons why students did not respond to SCEFs as well as they could do. The Group had also looked at the questions being asked, removing some questions which were no longer felt to be appropriate and revising others, making them shorter so that hopefully students would be more inclined to fill in the form.

6.2   Feedback from focus groups comprising students, academic staff and professional services had revealed that none of these three groups were aware of what the SCEF form was for or how the data generated was used.

6.3   Professor Shennan highlighted the fact that Class Representatives send out class surveys, as do academic staff. Consequently by the time SCEF forms were issued, students had had their fill of completing forms. Taking this on board, the Working Group had suggested that a way forward would be for Course Coordinators to work with Class Representatives to devise a single SCEF. The proposal had not beenwell received by student members of the Group, who felt that Class Representatives would not be willing to undertake this task. They pointed out that it was already difficult to get students willing to take on the Class Representative role.

6.4   The student members of the Committee were supportive of the suggestion that a single SCEF be sent out but pointed out that:

*   Class Representatives did not have access to all students on a course and were not able to send a class email with the new MyAberdeen app;
*   SCEF forms were harder to find in the new MyAberdeen;
*   students did not get notification that a SCEF form had been released, and
*   there was a perception that a SCEF form was more legitimate when it was sent out by School staff.

6.5   Members of the Committee shared their observation that the move from paper forms to online forms had led to a decline in the response rates. They suggested there would be merit in considering:

- the optimum point in the delivery of a course for seeking students' views on the course;
- the provision of more guidance to students on how the SCEF system worked;
- whether asking students to complete SCEF forms in a compulsory class would result in a higher return rate (medicine had used this approach with some areas achieving an 80% response rate);
- asking staff to take 5 minutes out of a lecture to encourage students to complete the SCEF form for the course, and
- consider whether there were other ways in which to gather feedback on courses.

7   Feedback from Internal Teaching Review (ITR) Pilot

(copy filed as UG/12118/006)

7.1   Members of the Committee considered the review of the recently piloted revised Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process which had been used by both the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture(LLMVC) and the School of Biological Sciences (SBS).

7.2   Professor Shennan reported that LLMVC had found the process less onerous in terms of paperwork, with copies of:

- Annual Course Reviews/Annual Programme Review/SCEF forms/Student Staff Liasion Committee minutes, External Examiner Reports and any responses to these;
- Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body reports and responses;
- past Internal Teaching Review submissions, reports and one-year follow up reports;
- School Plan QA metrics and associated Action Plans

all being stored on an ITR sharepoint site which the internal academic members of the panel could access at any point.

7.3   Both Schools had fed back that the evidence-based Critical analysis they had been asked to complete was a less demanding task than previously, but felt that it still could have been reduced further. Further changes included:

- Schools being required to map the curriculum against subject benchmarks;
- a heavier focus on students than previously, with a pedagogic partnership session introduced whereby staff and students discussed areas for development;
- a shorter ITR report focussing on areas of discussion and improvements, and
- a less onerous one year report.

7.4   There were a number of lessons which had been learned from the pilots including:

- the need to make Schools more aware of what was required to be done in advance of the ITR meeting;
- ensuring that all members of the ITR Panel were in attendance throughout all sessions;
- shortening the length of the ITR meeting from 2 to 1.5 days had had a detrimental effect. Whilst the shortened timeframe suited LLMVC it did not work for SBS where the final summing up session was too rushed. The recommendation was therefore to retain the 2 day structure.

7.5   Professor Pinard highlighted the fact that the School had found it difficult to find enough students to sufficiently represent the School's student body and that greater variety would have been

preferable. The School had found the unstructured nature of the pedagogical partnership session unhelpful and suggested that more facilitation would have been beneficial. Professor Shennan pointed out that SBS's experience had been different to LLMVC and undertook to take the points Professor Pinard had raised into account when reviewing the new process further.

8   Learning Analytics Process Update

8.1   Members noted the contents of the revised paper on the development of a policy on the use of student data for learning analytics, which would be considered at Senate in January.

9   Good Practice: "Friendly Friday" Policy

9.1   The Convener invited members to share with the Committee, their School's view on the possibility of adopting the "friendly Friday" policy whereby students were not given potentially bad news on a Friday. Whilst the School of Biological Sciences Executive had felt that this was a good idea which should be disseminated within the School and referred on to the Inclusion Committee, the School of Natural and Computing Science had been less convinced, fearing that it would be almost impossible to manage. The School of Geoscience was also less convinced, pointing out that delays tended to induce anxiety for students. The School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Dentistry had been broadly supportive of adopting this practice in the early years of study, but felt that the argument for rolling this out to senior years less convincing, particularly as it was felt that students needed to build resilience to cope with bad news.

9.2   The student members on the Committee impressed upon members:

- the need to keep in mind that students' mental health could be particularly vulnerable in programme years 1 and 2, and
- that feedback should be provided on the stated date as any delay could cause anxiety.

9.3   It was suggested that whilst there was no concensus amongst the Committee there would be merit in consideration being given institutionally about how best to manage student expectations for exam result days and whether there was a way in which to stop exam results being released on a Saturday.

10   AOCB

There was no other competent business.

For Information

11   Enhancement-Led Insitutional Review (ELIR) Timeline   **(***copy filed as UG/12118/008)*

Members noted the ELIR update including the schedule of meetings for the ELIR Panel visit from 19 to 23 November 2018 inclusive.

12   Date of the Next Meetings

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday, 14 January 2019 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.

[Clerk's Note: The date for the next meeting of the Committee was subsequently revised to Wednesday, 23 January 2019.]