UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting held on 12 January 2018

Present: Professor H Hutchison (Convener), Professor A Jenkinson (Convener), Dr T Baker, Dr P Davidson, Dr A Graham, Dr W Harrison, Dr G Hough, Ms M Leskovska, Professor D McCausland, Professor G McEwan, Dr T Mighall, Professor M Pinard, Dr A Widfeldt, Dr A Wilson, Mr A Yule, Mr M Fullerton (Clerk)

Apologies: Dr P Bishop, Ms D Connelly, Professor A Denison, Ms I Ewart, Mrs C MacDonald

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 OCTOBER 2017
(copy filed as UG/120118/001)

1.1   The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 27 October 2017 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

LECTURE CAPTURE POLICY

2.1   The Committee was asked to consider the most recent version of the lecture capture policy paper. It was noted that this was a topic which had been discussed by the Committee at length, but members were asked to confirm whether or not they felt their previous concerns had been addressed by the most recent amendments.

2.2   Regarding staff who may feel more comfortable recording their lectures in private, it was suggested that, while the policy did not exclude this option, recordings made with the Panopto software would link better with MyAberdeen.

2.3   There followed a discussion during which members from the Business School, the School of Education, and the School of Geosciences voiced concerns on behalf of their respective colleagues. It was noted that a proportion of staff from the Business School were resistant to the idea that those wishing to opt out of recording their lectures will require permission from the Head of School. In addition, staff from the School of Education took issue with matters relating to data protection and how the recordings were saved. Finally, it was pointed out that staff from the School of Geosciences were not in favour of lecture capture because of concerns regarding its impact on attendance and the student experience.

2.4   While it was proposed that staff with concerns relating to a potential effect on attendance should be directed to the evidence included with the policy, it was claimed that anecdotal evidence from students in the School of Geosciences indicated that the introduction of recordings would certainly have a negative impact on the uptake for lectures.

2.5   It was suggested that members distribute the lecture capture policy paper to staff in their Schools with a view to feeding back thoughts and concerns to their senators.

2.6   In cases where it was felt inappropriate to upload a full recording, it was pointed out that a summary or other replacement material may suffice instead. It was felt that this might go a long way to addressing concerns. While some members expressed worry that this could create additional work, it was agreed that this should be fed back for further discussion.
Action: Convener

2.7   The ease of using the Panopto software was discussed at length, as part of which it was agreed that the guidance provided was lacking and this should be fed back to the team responsible.
Action: Convener

2.8   In addition to difficulties using the software, some members recounted experiencing issues with the recording equipment. It was felt that an institutional roll out of this policy would require more technical support than was currently in place.

2.9   Clarity was sought regarding instances where students would produce recordings themselves during lectures and whether or not this should be allowed. It was agreed that this should be fed back for further discussion.

Action: Convener

2.10   It was noted that while the policy initially refers to 'educational activities', it refers almost exclusively to lectures at later points. Clarity was sought regarding other types of event, such as workshops and practicals, and how they applied. It was agreed that this should be fed back for further discussion.

Action: Convener

2.11   It was pointed out that there was evidence supporting the suggestion that the availability of recordings in the School of Engineering produced a negative effect on attendance. As part of the following discussion it was suggested that there be plans to withdraw mandatory recording where it was clear that attendance was being adversely affected. In response, it was proposed that what should be monitored is attainment and achievement of learning outcomes, with the suggestion that, if students continue to achieve, does attendance matter?

2.12   Referring to examples from the University of Bristol and the University of Exeter, it was noted that while similar practices did not cause a drop in attendance, closer study revealed that the staff producing the lectures in question were very popular among students.

ACADEMIC DISCIPLINARY POLICY

3.1   The Committee considered the proposed changes to the academic disciplinary policy, which had previously been discussed. It was hoped that, while the paper had not delivered what the Committee had looked for in the past, the revised version would be better received.

3.2   Members raised the concern regarding the newly introduced informal warning that not all course co-ordinators may process this stage in the same manner.

3.3   It was suggested that there should be two types of first offence – one where the offence has been born from ignorance and another where there is clear evidence of wilful cheating, the latter of which should go straight to the second stage in the process. In addition, it was proposed that the punishment levied against first offences at honours level, involving students who should in theory know better, should be more severe. In response to this, it was argued that students joining at higher levels would need to be an exception, thus creating a situation where it becomes necessary to create multiple policies for a variety of circumstances.

3.4   The issue of fairness was raised in terms of students who do not plagiarise, as part of which it was pointed out that students who commit these offences are penalised not to disadvantage them but to be fair to other students. There followed a brief discussion regarding the argument that it would be unfair if a student who is allowed to repeat an assignment were to receive a high grade whereas classmate who follows the rules ends up with a lower mark. It was suggested that the results from a second attempt should automatically drop a grade band.

3.5   It was felt that the process at School level should be recorded through a single channel, possibly using a standardised letter to ensure consistency. It was argued that a standardised letter would be too formal, however it was clarified that the formality in this case related to the process being dealt with in or out of the School.

3.6 It was suggested that students being allowed to repeat an assignment should not have access to feedback prior to resubmission, in order so that they were not seen to be benefitting from the extra attempt. In response, it was pointed out that staff had a limited window within which to release feedback.

3.7 It was agreed that two members of staff should be present at the meeting with a student, in case what is said ends up being disputed.

3.8 Members were asked to vote on whether or not they felt resubmission following an informal warning was appropriate, on which the Committee was split, with two members abstaining. It was then put to the Committee that resubmissions be capped at D3, of which the majority of members were in favour.

MYABERDEEN EXEMPLARY COURSE DESIGN

4.1 Mr Yule was invited to address the Committee regarding the MyAberdeen exemplary course design paper. It was explained that this was fallout from the Virtual Learning Environment Project Board, the remit of which is transformation of digital experience. It was noted that one of the difficulties faced in this endeavour is how best to define what is exemplar and should be aimed for, as well as which components of an electronic course make it exemplary and why.

4.2 Members were informed of a global competition organised by Blackboard, the educational technology company, through which a rubric for assessing courses had been developed. It was suggested that there may be ways in which this rubric could be adopted by the University.

4.3 Members were invited to offer their opinions on whether or not the document could be of use moving forward.

4.4 There followed a lengthy discussion on the merits of the sixteen points to determine an exemplary course included with the paper, which were largely praised as worth reflecting upon. It was felt that addressing each point in terms of what the University does and does not currently have could prove a useful discussion.

4.5 Regarding the rubric itself, which was considered by some to be far too extensive, it was suggested that the University's wider academic community may not appreciate being told how to teach their courses by Blackboard.

4.6 In summary, it was felt that the sixteen points could be useful to prompt discussion at School level, but members were less enthused to disseminate the larger spreadsheet.

4.7 Concern was raised that the virtual learning environment (VLE) was becoming less of a tool to improve what staff do, and instead requiring more from staff. It was felt that staff must already meet a variety of demands, such as recording lectures and uploading by deadlines, and that there was a danger of being dictated to by the VLE.

4.8 Mr Yul confirmed that the e-Learning Team's intention was not to impose technology on staff, rather it was their aim to assist them in supporting students to reach their potential.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT

5.1 Dr Baker was invited to introduce the institutional framework for feedback on assessment, originally written by Dr Darren Comber and Ms Katja Christie. It was noted that a new version had been produced in preparation for the upcoming Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) and in response to poor National Student Survey results on feedback, with a larger emphasis on feeding forward and formative feedback cycles.

5.2　There followed a discussion on the availability of the framework and similar information on feedback via the University's website, as part of which it was pointed out that there would likely soon be a change to the search engine being used by the site which would hopefully have a positive impact on how easily certain documents can be found.

5.3　The framework was considered largely useful, with the only concern raised being that the size of a class will unavoidably affect the quality of feedback. It was pointed out that Point 7, emphasising the flexibility of feedback and the many variables involved, was an attempt to address that issue.

5.4　Members were encouraged to distribute the framework at their respective teaching and learning committees, primarily to raise awareness of its existence.

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING

6.1　The Committee considered the paper entitled *Review of Policies and Practices for Accessible and Inclusive Learning*. The suggestion was made that a review of accessible and inclusive learning take place, with the Deans to meet with staff from Student Support and other areas to construct a wider view of the gaps, problems, and opportunities involved.

Action: Convener

6.2　It was noted that the scope of the paper could be wider, to do not only with disabilities, but with individuals from different social backgrounds and what should be done to address potential inequalities involving them. It was pointed out that the University was doing more tracking of protected categories than before.

6.3　It was agreed that more dialogue with Student Support to help explain the practicalities of what can and cannot be done easily on a large scale.

6.4　One member cited wheelchair access to the St Mary's Building as being particularly problematic.

6.5　It was pointed out that it would be especially useful if mental health difficulties could be considered alongside learning differences.

ANY OTHER COMMITTEE BUSINESS

7.1　Members were informed that Schools had been asked as part of preparations for the upcoming ELIR for information. It was noted that two e-mails had been circulated; one requesting examples showing use of benchmark statements, and another inviting staff to a preparatory workshop.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1　Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Monday 12 March 2018 at 2.00pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.