

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 12 March 2018

Present: Professor H Hutchison (Convener), Professor A Jenkinson (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Professor A Denison, Dr W Harrison, Professor D McCausland, Professor G McEwan, Professor M Pinard, Mrs Julie Adamson (Clerk).

Apologies: Dr T Baker, Dr J Borg-Barthet, Mrs J Bruce, Ms D Connelly, Dr P Davidson, Ms I Ewart, Dr A Graham, Dr G Hough, Ms M Leskovska, Dr M Macleod, Dr T Mighall, Dr A Widfeldt.

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2018

(copy filed as UG/120318/001)

- 1.1. The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 12 January 2018 as an accurate representation of discussions held.
- 1.2. Regarding the lecture capture action points, the committee was informed that the lecture capture paper went to Senate.

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE) PROCEDURES

(copy filed as UG/120318/002)

- 2.1. The Committee was asked for feedback on the new Transnational Education (TNE) procedures document, using the previous TNE Handbook as a reference point. It was noted that no cover paper was provided and no-one was available to present the new procedures document to the Committee.
- 2.2. The Committee queried the composition of the working group who put together the new TNE procedures document. There was concern that Schools didn't have the opportunity to fully represent themselves on the group. It was clarified that Senate members from each School had the opportunity to participate in the working group. There also doesn't seem to have been any student representation on the working group. Heads of School did not seem to be aware of the new document.
- 2.3. From a Quality Assurance perspective there were a lot of concerns about the new document. It does not go into the level of rigour one would expect from a QA document and there was concern that it would not meet the standard demanded by ELIR. The Committee questioned why the document was written without input from QAC for review purposes. It is also not clear why TNE proposals need to be approved solely by Senate – could they not be approved by QAC?
- 2.4. In terms of ease to follow and usability, the document does not set out a clear procedure, meaning that you can't use this document as a way to run TNE. The previous TNE Handbook went into significant detail about many important aspects of TNE and included a lot of guidance notes, for example the role of the Link Tutor. This level of detail is completely lost in the new document.
- 2.5. There were concerns over confidentiality in terms of having to share all documentation on TNE arrangements with Senate.
- 2.6. It was noted that the University already has TNE agreements in place (for example Qatar), and it was questioned as to whether we could use these arrangements to form the basis of a procedure.

- 2.7. Perceived cost implications to Schools were also an area of concern.
- 2.8. To summarise, there was no support for this document in its current form.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR) UPDATE

- 3.1. The ELIR Steering Group held a workshop for all ELIR School contacts in February. The focus was to consider how Schools / Disciplines were addressing the needs, including learning styles, support needs and expectations of different cohorts of students. Schools have been asked to prepare case studies based on discussions, and it is hoped they will be of a format to be used online for sharing good practice. A second workshop is scheduled for Friday 16th March. The focus will be on developing a new strategy for the identification, dissemination and measuring the impact of good practice. Members of the committee felt that it was useful to have these workshops in order to encourage sharing of good practice.
- 3.2. THE QAA will visit the University on Thursday 15th March for its annual institutional visit.
- 3.3. ELIR Context - Senate approved the proposed context within which the RA will be drafted.

SFC ANALYSIS OF HEI ANNUAL RETURN

(copy filed as UG/120318/003)

- 4.1. The Committee was asked to discuss the analysis of statements submitted to the Scottish Funding Council by Scottish Higher Education Institutions and to consider aspects of good and innovative practice which the University may wish to explore further.
- 4.2. Clarification was sought regarding how the information presented in this analysis was collated and how it compares with past performance. It would also be useful for university committees (e.g. UCTL, QAC) to see the annual statements before they are sent to the SFC.

ACTION: *Professor Jenkinson to seek clarification and feed back to the Committee Members.*

NOTE: *The document is a summary of ITR returns (AJ).*

- 4.3. Some Committee members noted that the University of Aberdeen doesn't seem to be named very often within this document. Could this suggest that the University is not a particularly proactive institution compared to others?

NOTE: The areas identified as good practice are taken from ITR returns. The number of times the University is mentioned will be influenced by the number of, and content of, the returns submitted annually. It is hoped that the new ITR format being piloted will help to raise greater awareness of areas of good practice (AJ).

- 4.4. It was noted that the University seems to be lacking in the Employability section (points 25-27).
- 4.5. Point 34 within the Student Support section stated that a number of institutions are working on their policy and practice around inclusion and equality and diversity. One Committee member suggested this would be an area for further investigation for the University of Aberdeen.
- 4.6. Point 38 regarding academic and staff development was also suggested as an area the University could build upon.
- 4.7. The Committee was invited to send any further feedback to the Convenors by email.

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING UPDATE

- 5.1. Professor Hutchison provided a brief update on Accessible and Inclusive Learning. Committee members were invited to consider examples of individual strategies for students which work well and those strategies which could be improved upon, and were asked to provide any feedback directly to Professor Hutchison by email.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION (GRADE SPECTRUM / GPA)

(copy filed as UG/120318/004)

- 6.1. The University has been operating a dual classification system since 2014/15 when the new Grade Point Average (GPA) system was introduced. The Committee was asked to consider the data presented in this paper and to provide feedback on the use of Grade Spectrum (GS) and GPA systems while specifically addressing the five discussion points in the paper.
- 6.2. Discussion Point 1. - General views of the use of Grade Spectrum or Grade Point Average for classification:
 - 6.2.1. Feedback from the Business School suggested that they would prefer to go back to just using the Grade Spectrum because it is perceived as an easier system for both staff and students to follow and their External Examiners have expressed concerns regarding the 22-point GPA system. Lack of transparency of the GPA system's alphanumeric bandings was also highlighted. There are discrepancies between Schools regarding whether the decimalised GPAs are released to students.
 - 6.2.2. Feedback from Medical Sciences was that the GPA system appears to disadvantage students compared to the use of GS. The use of the Grade Point Median is seen as confusing and overcomplicated compared to GPA systems in place at other institutions and the system lacks transparency for students.
 - 6.2.3. Psychology feedback suggested that more students seem to get a First using the GS method of classification.
 - 6.2.4. From Biological Sciences' perspective, the GPA seems to be working well. The Grade Point Median produces similar results to the Grade Spectrum. In terms of workload, it is beneficial that the Student Records System can calculate classifications using the GPA method. There is support for GPA from this School.
 - 6.2.5. The Committee noted the importance of the Student Record System being able to compute the degree classification calculation.
 - 6.2.6. Some Committee members suggested that a new GPA scale would be better, for example one that follows a more internationally recognised model and uses percentages.
 - 6.2.7. There was no clear consensus from the Committee regarding which classification system is preferred.
- 6.3. Discussion Point 2. – Relative weightings of programme years 3 and 4:
 - 6.3.1 Concern was raised regarding the weighting of individual elements contributing to the degree classification. For example, if one School double weights their 30-credit dissertation then degrees are being classified using an additional 30 credit element. This is particularly problematic for students on Joint Honours degrees across two different Schools. It was suggested that double weighting of any given element should not be permitted and that the weighting is simply reflected by the number of credits the course is worth.

- 6.3.2. Because there are so many Joint Honours degrees within the Master of Arts programme, some disciplines feel that it would be desirable to have a more consistent approach across the University and would support enforcing 50/50 weighting for levels 3 and 4.
- 6.3.3. A 50/50 approach was not seen as appropriate for all Schools or disciplines.
- 6.3.4. Some Committee members suggested that there was no requirement for the University to operate a 50/50 weighting system across the board when this may not be suited to all disciplines. As long as the system being used is clear to staff and students from the outset then Schools should be free to choose what is appropriate for them.
- 6.3.5. There was no clear consensus from the Committee regarding this discussion point.
- 6.4. Discussion Point 3 – Compensatory Credits:
- 6.4.1. The Committee agreed that, where applicable, the University should still use compensatory credits.
- 6.5. Discussion Point 4. – Borderline process for Grade Spectrum:
- 6.5.1. One Committee member suggested that the Grade Spectrum should be used more directly and therefore there would be no requirement to have a borderline – either a student does or does not meet the requirements of a specific classification band.
- 6.5.2. The Committee noted that there is also inconsistency between Schools in the use of a borderline process under the GPA system.
- 6.5.3. There was an overall consensus that whatever system will be used in the future, there needs to be some additional work on determining a process for borderline classifications.
- 6.6. Discussion Point 5. – Use of course grades (rather than individual assessment elements) in the Grade Spectrum:
- 6.6.1. The Committee agreed that a course grade should count as one element towards the Grade Spectrum and highlighted that there should be consistency across Schools in terms of using the credit weighting (rather than double weighting of any element).

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE

(copy filed as UG/120318/005)

- 7.1. Professor Jenkinson introduced this paper. The Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) has been revised to encompass discussions held at previous committee meetings. Flexibility has now been introduced to the standard first phase of the process, allowing the Head of School to request resubmission if deemed appropriate. Students have also been able to feed into this revision by means of sitting on the Undergraduate Committee and University Teaching and Learning Committee.
- 7.2. Committee members agreed that the amended range of options for dealing with a first time offence (section 4.2.5.) was helpful and will allow more discretion from the Head of School when the student has mitigating circumstances.

7.3. It would be helpful for both staff and students to see a flowchart outlining the process.

ACTION: Professor Jenkinson to clarify if a flowchart already exists and where it can be downloaded.

NOTE: Flowcharts providing an overview of the discipline process are available for both staff and students on the Academic Quality Handbook website:

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/student-discipline-and-fitness-to-practise-6120.php>

7.4. Committee members requested that the line “(including first time offences)” be added to section 4.2.8. after “any case where plagiarism is suspected”. This would make it clearer that if a first time offence is deemed to be more serious in nature that it can be immediately escalated.

7.5. Members noted that section 6.2.1. requires clarification to ensure that although the standard outcome is awarding a G3, the Head of School can select one of the options from section 4.2.5. if this is decided to be more appropriate.

7.6. Regarding Healthcare Education degree programmes – if misconduct is found then the student is subject to fitness to practice procedures. Should something be added to this updated Code to reflect that other processes may be used subject to specific regulations?

ACTION: Professor Jenkinson to clarify

NOTE: The paper will be amended for Senate, taking into consideration the comments from the various committees, including the above point from the UG Committee (AJ).

7.7. The Committee recommend this paper is taken forward with minor clarification points addressed as outlined above.

STAFFING OF EXAM VENUES

8.1. Members noted that a paper regarding staffing of exam venues will follow by email circulation prior to the upcoming UCTL.

FOR ROUTINE APPROVAL - CHANGES TO DEGREE REGULATIONS – OMNIBUS

9.1. The committee has not met its quorate today. Any comments should be sent to the Convenors by email.

FOR INFORMATION - APPEALS, COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINE REPORTING

10.1. Members noted that a paper regarding appeals, complaints and discipline will follow by email circulation prior to the upcoming UCTL. Professor Jenkinson provided some background information regarding the aims of the paper.

FOR INFORMATION – SECTOR UPDATES

10.2. The Committee noted the following recent sector updates:

[QAA Scotland Annual Report 2016-17](#)

QAA Scotland has published its annual report, highlighting achievements and key events from 2016-17. The report includes details of the launch of the current Enhancement Theme - Evidence for

Enhancement, as well as the revised review method in Scotland and Focus On: Institution-led Review and Postgraduate Student Experience projects.

[Enterprise and Entrepreneurship: New Advice for Universities](#)

The QAA have launched revised guidance intended to inform, enhance and promote the development of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education across UK higher education. This guidance, led by Professor Andrew Penaluna of the International Institute for Creative Entrepreneurship, reflects current thinking and practice in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education.

ANY OTHER COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- 11.1. Professor Hutchison raised the issue of how the University can address the impact of strike action on students' exams. It was suggested that exam papers, which have already been approved by External Examiners, may need to be amended to ensure that questions are not being asked on material which has not been taught due to the industrial action. Short courses and block teaching are particularly vulnerable to the effects of staff not being available.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 12.1. Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held in the following academic year (2018/2019) and the date is TBC.