

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 06 August 2018

Present: Professor P McGeorge (Convenor), Dr T Baker, Dr J Borg-Barthet, Ms D Connelly, Dr A Graham, Mr E Grant, Dr W Harrison, Dr G Hough, Mrs T Innes, Professor M Pinard, Dr A Widfeldt, Mrs Julie Adamson (Clerk).

Apologies: Professor WD McCausland, Dr P Davidson, Professor A Denison, Professor A Jenkinson, Professor G McEwan, Dr T Mighall, Dr J Perkins.

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2018

(copy filed as UG/060818/001)

- 1.1. The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 12 March 2018 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

REMIT AND COMPOSITION

(copy filed as UG/060818/002)

- 2.1. The Committee approved the remit and composition.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR): REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

(copy filed as UG/060818/003)

- 3.1. Professor McGeorge introduced the Reflective Analysis on the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review and noted that it has now been proof-read and sent to print. Thanks were noted for everyone's input toward this document and many suggestions were taken on board. The paper conveys the positive steps the institution is taking. The Reflective Analysis should serve as way for us as an institution to plan our priorities, future strategies and activities.
- 3.2. The Committee commented that the theme of mental health seems to be prominent currently in higher education. The Committee considered whether we have a prevention strategy and a way forward to build an environment that meets the mental health needs of staff and students. It was noted that the Mental Health Working Group have developed a "Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy", but it was felt that more needed to be done on prevention of mental health issues developing.

ACTION: Professor McGeorge to seek clarification regarding the operation of the Mental Health Working Group following a change to the University's Senior Management structure.

- 3.3. The Committee discussed improving engagement with local schools / colleges and implementing a structure for keeping track of engagement. For example, could a database be created to collate information about links which Departments may have with local schools and colleges? It would be helpful if such a database were to be maintained centrally (e.g. by Student Recruitment and Admissions?). Examples were cited of the BP Tutor Monitoring Programme and National Undergraduate Ambassador Scheme. The importance of resource being available for such a project was highlighted as well as working across disciplines, taking an institutional approach.

ACTION: Professor McGeorge to seek clarification regarding the possibility of a teaching and learning fund which would give money to Schools (as part of their budget), which they could then decide to spend on engagement and outreach activities.

- 3.4. The possibility of organising an engagement event was discussed. The Head Teachers from Aberdeen schools would be invited to a networking event at the University which would involve representatives from all subject disciplines as well as the Library and Careers Service. An event like this would be an opportunity to discuss how the University can help benefit local schools, and equally what we can gain from having better links with them.
- 3.5. Communication was also suggested as a priority for consideration. The importance of central co-ordination of all forms of communication was discussed (e.g. plasma screens and posters as well as electronic communication via email and VLE). It was noted that a Communication Working Group has been established. The most appropriate communication method for the message being promoted should be considered.
- 3.6. The Committee noted that “Internationalisation” appears regularly in the Reflective Analysis and discussed the importance of the University maintaining its credentials as an international institution.
- 3.7. Making the best use of physical space was discussed. It was noted that this something which would be considered by the Capital Programme Management Committee.

ACTION: Professor McGeorge will check if there are any relevant reports from the Capital Programme Management Committee regarding physical space.

- 3.8. The Committee noted that the University’s current Strategic Plan ends in 2020 and members were encouraged to think about how points raised in the Reflective Analysis could help develop a new strategy and consider the operationalisation of some of the activities which would contribute towards the strategy.
- 3.9. The Committee noted that the ELIR panel will be visiting on 10th October for a planning meeting, where they will meet with small number of staff and students. The panel will return in November for one week. The structure of that visit will not be determined until after the planning meeting. From 17th September the ELIR panel will have access to the SharePoint and Schools are reminded to ensure that information is up to date.

ACTION: Professor McGeorge will recirculate important dates relating to the ELIR panel visit.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY COMPARISON (INSTITUTIONAL) DRAFT PAPER

(copy filed as UG/060818/004)

- 4.1. Professor McGeorge introduced this draft paper which compares the institution’s performance on individual questions to last year’s figures as well as to the newly introduced benchmarks. OfS have produced individual institution benchmarks for each NSS question, which reflect the sector average percentage and have been adjusted to take account of the following factors at each institution – subject of study, age, sex, ethnicity, disability and mode of study. The 2018 figures suggest that the University is making good progress and should be viewed in a positive light. Committee members were asked to reflect on areas for improvement and how this could be achieved.
- 4.2. The Committee discussed question 10; “Feedback on my work has been timely”, and noted that this topic consistently has a less positive response from students. There were concerns about the wording of the

question (and previous versions of this question) and how it is interpreted. For example, could “timely” be interpreted as receiving feedback in enough time to prepare the next assessment? It was suggested that Schools could ask students to explain their own interpretation of the question. The Feedback Taskforce may also wish to consider the results of this question.

- 4.3. Expectations around “timeliness” could be better managed. For example, some students in the School of Biological Sciences were asked what they considered to be timely feedback and replied that three days would be timely. Communicating more realistic expectations to students is important and would take into account the class size, marking time taken per assignment and complexity of marking. MyAberdeen could be updated with an estimated date for feedback.
- 4.4. It was suggested that Schools could use the same terminology in their School Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF) as is used in the NSS. Explanations of the meanings of the questions could also be included. The School of Biological Sciences have piloted this approach and can feed the results back to the Committee at a later meeting.
- 4.5. The Committee discussed how positive results from the NSS could be used as a recruitment tool.

ACTION – *Professor McGeorge to seek clarification regarding Schools promoting their positive survey outcomes on their own social media / webpages.*

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION - DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 5.1. Members noted that the next meeting of the Undergraduate Committee will be held on Monday 17 September 2018 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2.