UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE
Minute of Meeting Held on 19 October 2020

Present: Abbe Brown (Chair), Euan Bain, Jason Bohan, Justin Borg-Barthet, Taylan Campbell, Stuart Durkin, Bill Harrison, Gerard Hough, Tracy Innes, Natalie Kinchin-Williams, Ondrej Kucerack, David McCausland, Tim Mighall, Tarken Moore, and Shona Potts with Craig Stewart in attendance.

Apologies: Leigh Bjorkvoll, Michelle Pinard, Pat Rowand and Ruth Taylor

1.   Approval of the Minute of the Undergraduate Committee Meeting Held on 8 June 2020

1.1   The minute of the meeting held 8 June 2020 was confirmed as an accurate record.

2.   Approval of the Minute of the Joint Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee Meeting Held on 3 August 2020

2.1   The minute of the Joint Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee meeting held 3 August 2020 was confirmed as an accurate record pending the inclusion of Ondrej Kucerak in the list of attendees.

3.   Approval of the Minute of the Joint Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee Meeting Held on 13 October 2020

3.1   The minute of the meeting held 8 June 2020 was confirmed as an accurate record pending the alphabetisation of the list of attendees.

4.   Matters Arising

4.1   There were no matters arising.

5.   Committee Remit, Composition and Role Descriptor

5.1   Members noted the Committee's remit, composition and the associated role descriptor, observing that Justin Borg-Barthet's name had been inadvertently omitted from the list of members.

5.2   It was suggested that it would be helpful to rotate future meetings of the Committee so that some could be held on Wednesday afternoons and thus hopefully maximise attendance.

6.   Discussion on Draft Policy on Inclusion and Accessibility in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

6.1   Members were invited to comment on the draft policy on Inclusion and Accessibility in Teaching, Learning and Assessment. It was noted that the policy would also be considered by the Postgraduate Committee and the UCTL prior to consideration by Senate and Court. In parallel, feedback on the policy was also being sought from various other committees within the institution.

6.3   A request was made that section 1.3 of the policy also mention the international instruments upon which the legislation was built.

6.4   It was observed that the policy as written primarily focussed on staff responsibilities and staff-led mechanisms. It was suggested that Section 3, Responsibilities, be expanded to include students. If this proposed revision was accepted, thought would be required in order to ascertain what student responsibilities would be and where they might fit into the policy. In addition to the responsibilities associated with student membership of University Committees, students might need to be included in discussions on topics such as curricular content and design. Members also felt that the policy lacked clarity on where the responsibilities for widening participation lay. It was suggested that more detail on equality and diversity for those who may wish to become applicants and the mechanisms to support them would be helpful.

6.5   Members of the Committee wished to add that access to remote-learning provision and e-books could be provided where possible and, given that there were logistical restrictions on what could practicably be offered, it was requested that this be accounted for. It was noted that similar points were picked up in the policy in regard to the need for further resources, although this did not address every possible issue. This was noted for further consideration. The wish to avoid including caveats on the points within the policy was stressed, as there was concern that this could be interpreted as providing areas where opting out was possible. Rather the policy should set out practical guidance.

6.6   It was requested that the protections set out in respect of pregnancy and maternity could be extended to include parental rights and that consideration could be given to adding to the list in section 2.2 to include matters such as political opinion. It was clarified that Section 2.2 listed protected characteristics under the Equality Act, while section 2.3 expanded upon this with examples of characteristics not currently covered, making it an appropriate place in which to include political opinion. Further review could be made of the exact wording of the Equality Act on pregnancy and maternity. It was emphasised that the list in Section 2.3 was not intended to be exhaustive and that it was planned that the policy would be reviewed on a regular basis creating scope for expansion. Indeed, the qualitative nature of the list allowed scope for characteristics that may not have been included to be considered.

6.7   The Committee asked for a definition of the term "efficient delivery" as used in section 2.4 of the paper. It was explained the intention was to communicate that delivery should be proportionate, viable and workable. Members queried whether the use of the word "efficient" was necessary. It was suggested that the phrase "subject to the principle of proportionality" could be added but it was acknowledged that that had the potential to weaken the impression given by the text.

6.8   It was noted that the policy contained a number of sub-sections/lists and it was requested that these either be numbered or lettered.

6.9   Section 5.8 suggested that the promotion process for colleagues on the Teaching and Scholarship track include "specific regard to embedding inclusion and accessibility in their practice and that of others". Members voiced concerns that this might create an obstacle or isolate staff where there were not opportunities for staff to embed inclusion and accessibility explicitly into their practice. Whilst accepting that the wording of the section would benefit from review, it was stressed that the intention was to increase the opportunities staff had in working towards promotion rather than create an additional burden. The Committee generally welcomed the inclusion of this point but was of the view that the responsibilities set out were for all staff, not just for Teaching and Scholarship staff. The importance of stressing that these responsibilities applied to all in order to avoid any misconception that other staff were exempt was acknowledged. It was suggested that there should be further discussion regarding whether

this point belonged in this policy and, if so, whether it should be linked explicitly to promotion. Members requested further clarity on how the policy related to the annual review process, noting that greater specificity was required. It was explained that the underlying thinking was to mainstream the importance of equality and diversity in annual review and promotion processes and catalyse cultural change.

6.10 Clarity was sought on the point of equality and inclusion being installed as a standing agenda item for teaching and learning meetings and staff student liaison committees. Clarification was sought on whether this meant the creation of a new role or the continuation of an established one. Whilst it was understood that this was a new role, it was acknowledged that some Schools may already have similar processes in place. Further detail expanding on how this might operate was considered.

6.11 An explanation on how the policy would articulate with Athena Swan and, in particular, where the boundaries might lie was sought. Whilst it was understood that the policy would exist separately from Athena Swan, there was some apprehension that if the two were closely tied, equality and diversity might not be perceived as central to the University's business.

6.12 There was concern about the requirement for Schools to propose new courses only after a process of analysis had taken place to ascertain how the course met the obligations set out in the policy. There were concerns that this could slow down the course approval process and it was requested that more practical detail be provided. It was acknowledged that a drafting a separate paper might help clarify this.

6.13 The draft policy stipulated that learning materials were released at least 48 hours in advance of events. It was suggested that there could be pushback, especially where new courses were concerned and there were concerns regarding the impact upon staff wellbeing. It was also unclear how such a policy would be enforced.

6.14 It was explained that the policy was being developed in parallel to work ongoing in regard to decolonising the curriculum and that would be a point at which both pieces of work would interact. The introductory paragraphs would be reviewed to clarify the specific purpose of the document.

6.15 Members queried where responsibilities would lie in cases where outside teaching is delivered and placements and asked if an associated document covered the responsibilities of co-curricular teaching and professional services. It was confirmed that a "parent" University Equality and Diversity Policy existed to which the draft policy under consideration would be linked.

6.16 The Committee were asked for their views on the proposal to establish a three-year review process. Whilst there had been proposals to integrate this with ITR process, it was believed that the design of the ITR process could not accommodate this. There were proposals to develop structures under the ITR process to allow for self-monitoring and review, however it was currently unclear what form this process would take. It was acknowledged that ensuring that any new courses being developed met the requirements of the policy using existing checklists could be comparatively simple. To review existing courses within a three-year timespan would be much more complex and it was suggested that five years might be a more achievable timeline. It was confirmed that there was no wish for the policy to add to existing administrative burdens and that the intention was to make the policy as integrated as possible. In order to achieve this the policy should be integrated into the remit of Senate, with annual programme

reviews feeding into the ITR. Integration with the ITR may override the need for a separate process and it was agreed that integration within existing processes with specific guidance would be preferable.

6.17 It was requested that additional resources and support be allocated to aid Schools in implementing the policy. It was suggested that the employment of an external expert might be beneficial in reviewing courses. It was agreed upfront support, such as training and resources, would be necessary. It was further suggested that members of QAC should be in possession of the expertise required in order to ascertain if course standards were being met.

6.18 The Committee's views were sought on whether more detail on methods of implementation was necessary. Following clarification of the kind of detail being expected, Committee members reiterated their concerns about the associated extra administrative burden. It was suggested that remits for deputy staff with equality and diversity roles, in addition to those overseeing Athena Swan duties, within Schools would be helpful as no Schools currently had such a role in place. It was also suggested that clarity on whether a specific Dean role would be appropriate would be advantageous.

6.19 It was confirmed that the Committee would be given the opportunity to view a further draft drawing on feedback from other committees.

7. AOCB

7.1 There was no other competent business.

For Information

8. University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL)

8.1 Committee members' attention was drawn to the agendas for the 21 May 2020, 22 June 2020, 5 August 2020 and 7 October 2020 meetings of the UCTL. Members were asked to note that an extraordinary UCTL would be held on 14 October 2020 whilst the next scheduled meeting of the UCTL was due to take place on 12 November 2020.

9. Date of Next Meeting

9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at 2 pm on Tuesday, 8 December 2020.