

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting Held on 23 January 2019

Present: Professor A Jenkinson (Convener), Dr T Baker, Dr E Bain, Dr J Bohan, Ms I Drdakova (student member), Dr A Graham, Mr E Grant, Dr W T A Harrison, Dr G Hough, Ms N Kinchin-Williams, Professor W D McCausland, Professor G McEwan, Dr T Mighall, Ms J Paneva (student member), Dr J Perkins and Dr R Wilkie, with Mrs P Rowand (Clerk).

Apologies: Dr J Borg-Bartlett, Professor A Denison, Mrs T Innes, Professor P McGeorge, Professor M Pinard and Dr A Widfeldt.

1 Minute of the Meeting Held on 12 November 2018 *(copy filed as UG/230119/001)*

1.1 The minute of the meeting held on 12 November 2018 was confirmed as an accurate record.

2 Matters Arising

2.1 **Minute 2.1** The Convener informed members that the Mental Health Working Group had met on 21 January 2019, chaired by the Director of People. Going forward the Group would fall under the remit of the new Senior Vice Principal. Whilst the remit and the composition of the Working Group would be reviewed, the Convener wished to assure members that the intention was for the Mental Health Working Group to continue with the roles and activities with which it was currently associated.

2.2 Members were advised that updates on the:-

- possibility of establishing a teaching and learning fund (**Minute 2.2**), and
- Capital Programme Management Committee reports on the best use of physical space (**Minute 2.3**)

were still awaited.

2.3.1 **Minute 4** With the composition of the short-life Working Group on Policies and Practices for Accessible and Inclusive Learning having been discussed at the Postgraduate and Undergraduate Committees and the UCTL, the Convener sought (a) volunteer(s) to represent the Undergraduate Committee on the Group. The importance of ensuring that the Group members were interested and keen to engage constructively in the process was stressed. Any member of the Committee interested in participating in the Working Group was therefore asked to contact the Convener as soon as possible.

Action: All

2.3.2 The Convener reported that the proposed membership of the Working Group would include representation from Student Support, the Centre for Academic Development, the Student Learning Service and the Library, as well as representatives from every School. It was hoped that the Group would comprise staff from a wide range of roles, including Senior Personal Tutors, Disability Officers and School Administrative Officers. It was acknowledged that involvement in the Group's activities would have to be taken into account in School workload models. Consequently the inclusion of individuals on the group would be submitted as a formal request to their Head of School.

2.3.3 It was noted that the UCTL was supportive of the planned approach but wished to review the proposed remit and composition of the Group.

3 Honours Weighting in Degree Classification

(copy filed as UG/230119/002)

3.1 Following on from the discussions at previous meetings of the Committee members were invited to:

- consider the revised paper on the weighting of Honours years in degree classification, and
- consult with their Schools on the contents of the paper, bringing their Schools views/comments back to the 25 February 2019 meeting of the Committee where further consideration would take place, with Professor Shennan in attendance. Thereafter the paper would be considered at the March meeting of Senate.

Action: All

3.2 Members were pleased to note that the paper acknowledged that some Schools had 5 year programmes. The proposal stipulated that there was an expectation that in classifying degrees levels 3 and 4 (and where applicable level 5) should be equally weighted but allowed for Schools to make a subject-specific case to deviate from this. Members stressed that it was important to ensure that the result of any discipline seeking to deviate from the equal weighting mode did not have the effect of unilaterally changing the weighting of the joint Honours MA degrees.

3.3 The fact that the paper stipulated that level 3 must be included in degree classification at a minimum of 30% was noted, suggesting that the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition's detailed response had not been acknowledged.

3.4 Some members indicated that there was a strong initial preference in their Schools for equal weighting at levels 3, 4 and 5 (if applicable), others felt there was a need to take into account the upwards trajectory of students from their junior to senior honours years, proposing that a 30:70 or 40:60 split was more appropriate. It was suggested that further argument to move away from a 50:50 model was the extent to which students articulating from College struggled in their junior honours year. Concerns were also expressed over a possible detrimental effect on the classification of medical science students alongside intercalating degrees.

3.5 Committee members were interested in establishing whether there would be standard criteria for the Panel approving a request to deviate from the University agreed classification model and queried whether any such approval would be time limited or indefinite.

3.6 The Convener undertook to draw the points raised to the attention of Professor Shennan.

Action: Professor Jenkinson

4 Borderline Zone and Criteria

(copy filed as UG/230119/003)

4.1 As with the previous paper, members of the Committee were asked to circulate the Borderline Zone and Criteria paper within their School and to facilitate consultation on:

- the extent of the borderline band in degree classification and
- the criteria Examiners' meetings should consider when determining degree classification

bringing their School's views back to the next meeting of the Committee for detailed discussion.

4.2 Pending further consideration of the paper within their Schools members shared their initial thoughts. Whilst some members were supportive of the borderline zone being narrowed or removed entirely, others were not in favour of a reduction, fearing that there would be detrimental effect upon the number of first and upper second class degrees awarded.

4.3 Members stressed that a borderline result should not be viewed as a means of automatic promotion to a higher degree classification, but should be seen as a means to identify students for referral to the Examination Board.

4.4 In considering the borderline criteria set out in section 3 of the paper ,members sought clarification on whether it was the intention that Examination Boards would be given an element of choice/discretion in the criteria to be applied or that University wide criteria would require to be applied.

5 Abolishment of Rounding Up of Course Grades *(copy filed as UG/230119/04)*

5.1 Members noted the contents of the paper setting out the ramifications of rounding up grades when awarding alphanumeric grades for courses. As with the previous two papers, members of the Committee were asked to consult on the paper within their own School and to bring back their School's consensus to contribute to a detailed discussion of the paper at the Undergraduate Committee's February meeting.

5.2 Members were generally supportive of the move to abolish the practice of rounding up course grades. Members felt that providing unrounded-up grade points would give students a more realistic picture of their likely degree classification and suggested that there would be merit in releasing grades to 2 decimal points.

6 Publication of External Examiners' Reports

6.1 The Convener informed members that whilst the full report from the Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) Panel was not due to be received until February, it was expected that a recommendation would be that the institution should consider publishing External Examiners' reports. Members were invited to comment on how this recommendation might be taken forward.

6.2 In considering the suggestion External Examiners' reports be made public members of the Committee raised the following points:

- External Examiners might feel constrained were their reports to be published on the University website and might be less likely to put their names to their report;
- it might be necessary to get permission from each External Examiner to publish their reports;
- a tick box could be included on the report pro-forma to allow the Examiner to indicate the comments s/he were content to make public, and
- in order to ensure student confidentiality reports would require to be redacted;
- the publication of External Examiners' reports could be viewed as an extension of the SCEF process and, from a quality assurance perspective, a means of publishing information on how the University was continually enhancing its degree programmes, and
- were the institution to go down this route, careful consideration would have to be given as to where the reports would be housed.

6.3 It was observed that some other Universities did routinely publish their External Examiners' reports and it was suggested that there would be merit in finding out the approach adopted by other institutions in this regard.

7 Undergraduate Committee Role Descriptor *(copy filed as UG/230119/05)*

7.1 Following on from the discussion which had taken place at the previous meeting of the Committee, the Convener had prepared the circulated draft role descriptor for members of the Undergraduate Committee. A parallel role descriptor for Postgraduate Committee members had also been

developed and had been considered by the Postgraduate Committee at its most recent meeting, receiving broad approval.

7.2 Members endorsed the role descriptor, which they felt captured well the activities of the Committee and the expectations placed upon Committee members, including their role in both providing information to and feedback from School to Committee and vice versa.

7.3 During the course of discussion members highlighted the fact that, whilst planned changes in policy and process were brought to the Committee for discussion, and the views of the Committee taken into account when papers went on to be considered by UCTL and Senate, clarity was required on which policies had been approved. With Senate also having a view on the matter under consideration, it could mean that the version of the document considered by the Undergraduate Committee was not the final approved version. Given this, it was agreed that there would be merit in bringing papers back to the Committee post-Senate. In addition it was suggested that providing the Committee with feedback/updates from the UCTL would also be beneficial. The Convener undertook to give some consideration as to how best this might be achieved.

Action: Professor Jenkinson

7.4 Concerns were voiced over fact that the Co-Convener position of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for Arts and Social Sciences remained vacant and would continue to be so, pending the outcome of the new Vice Principal's review of the role of the Deans. The Convener impressed upon members that in practical terms she did not regard herself as discipline specific and would provide support across all areas of the University.

8 AOCB

There was no other competent business.

For Information

9 Date of the Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday, 25 February 2019 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.