

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of Meeting Held on 26 April 2019

Present: Professor A Jenkinson (Convener), Professor A Denison, Dr A Graham, Dr W T A Harrison, Dr G Hough, Professor W D McCausland, Miss S McCourt, Professor G McEwan, Ms J Paneva (student member), Professor M Pinard, Dr J Perkins and Dr A Widfeldt, with Mrs P Rowand (Clerk).

Apologies: Dr E Bain, Dr T Baker, Dr J Bohan, Dr J Borg-Bartlett, Ms I Drdakova (student member), Mr E Grant, Mrs T Innes, Ms N Kinchin-Williams, Professor P McGeorge, and Dr T Mighall.

1 Minute of the Meeting Held on 25 February 2019

1.1 The minute of the meeting held on 25 February 2019 was confirmed as an accurate record.

2 Matters Arising

2.1 Minute 2.2 The Convener reported that it was the intention that a presentation on the development works to be undertaken on the King's College campus would be given at the next meeting of Senate. The Convener would try to obtain a copy of the presentation slides and make these available to Undergraduate Committee members.

Action: *Professor Jenkinson*

2.2 Minute 2.4 The Convener highlighted the fact that links to the agenda for the last meeting of the UCTL and the Senate Digest had been included in the paperwork for this meeting and confirmed that this approach would continue to be used going forward.

2.3 Minute 6.1 The Convener updated members on the case of the Geosciences student who had encountered difficulties in accessing an adjustable height desk in a computer lab. It transpired that Estates had been communicating directly with the student in regard to the issue and that the School had been unaware of this.

3 Honours Weighting in Degree Classification

3.1 Professor Shennan explained that the paper on the weighting of honours years was being presented to the Committee again for consideration, prior to submission to the UCTL and Senate, as it had been amended to take into account the ELIR Panel's recommendations.

3.2 It was noted that in order to achieve as much consistency as possible across Schools there would only be two different ways of classifying – 50:50 or 30:70 (for 4 year degrees) and 25:35:40 (for 5 year degrees). Schools would be required to inform the Quality Assurance Committee of their chosen weighting model so that the information could be made publicly available.

3.3 Members raised concerns regarding the classification of joint degrees, and, in particular, joint honours MA degrees. Whilst currently the way in which joint honours MA degrees were classified was, with a few exceptions, mostly consistent across the institution, moving to an approach where Schools unilaterally decided on the honours weighting could, it was suggested, lead to greater inconsistencies.

- 3.4 Responding to members' concerns, the Convener reported that the UCTL had recognised that this might be an issue and there had been some discussion around potential discrepancies in weightings within joint degrees. UCTL had suggested that it would be acceptable for 50% of a joint honours degree classification to be calculated differently, as long as the students on the programme were made aware of how their degree classification would be calculated.
- 3.5 Members representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition voiced concerns that their School's views on honours weighting were not represented in the paper. Professor Shennan confirmed that the School's concerns had been taken into account as had the views of students within the School: the MMSN School Convener had, she advised, stated categorically that students wished their 3rd year results to be included in calculating their degree classification.

4 Code of Practice on Assessment

- 4.1 Members noted the contents of the paper updating the Code of Practice on Assessment for academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20 in line with Senate approved changes. As some of the changes approved required a lead in time to ensure that there would be no detriment to students already in their Honours years, the paper included an appendix detailing when the changes would be brought into force.
- 4.2 It was noted that the revised Code of Practice on Assessment for 2020/21 included changes to the weighting of Honours years which would be considered by Senate in May. There was therefore the possibility that some further changes to wording might be required in light of the discussion at Senate.
- 4.3 Discussion ensued on the reduction of the borderline zone and the fact that students with 50% of their credits in a higher classification must be considered for upgrading. Whilst some members of the Committee were concerned by the move to a more formulaic approach, others welcomed the fact that this would bring greater consistency across the institution. Members queried whether it would be possible to develop a programme which would classify borderline results automatically. The Convener suggested that this could be looked at once the change in process had been implemented and used for a year or two.
- 4.4 Members highlighted the need to ensure that students were made aware that if their grades were in the borderline zone, this meant that they would be considered for the award of the higher degree, and that there was no guarantee that the higher classification would be awarded.
- 4.5 Members were advised that a summary timeline would be prepared and brought back to the Committee. The summary paper would be circulated to all Exam Boards.

5 Review of Student Course Evaluation Process

- 5.1 Professor Shennan presented the paper on the findings of the Student Course Evaluation (SCEF) Working Group, explaining that the Working Group's recommendations took into account both student and staff views of SCEF as gleaned through focus groups held in July 2018.
- 5.2 Whilst recommending that consideration be given to the purchase of a commercial course evaluation system which would provide the capability for cross-institutional analysis, the Working Group had made a number of recommendations which it felt could provide "quick

wins". These included re-naming SCEF as the Course Feedback Form and redesigning the form so that it included fewer cross-institutional questions which were meaningless and instead focussed on asking questions about what was working well, what was not and what could be better. Further recommendations included updating the Academic Quality Handbook to provide clarification on who was responsible for the form, mandatory questions and timing.

- 5.3 Members noted the example Course Feedback Form appended to the paper and suggested that the inclusion of a question asking students to comment on their enjoyment of the course was not good metric. Accepting this point, members were advised that, with Course Coordinators now being given more autonomy to choose the questions to be included in the Course Feedback Form, the question could be removed from the form should it be deemed to be an inappropriate question to ask. It was also suggested that the new form could be used as an opportunity to ask students to draw to the School's attention a member of staff who had made a difference to them.
- 5.4 Some discussion ensued on the role of the Class Representative in the process and it was suggested that the paper should make this relationship clear.
- 5.5 Members were of the view that training on designing surveys and the associated ethics would be beneficial for both staff and students. The Convener undertook to raise this with CAD.

Action: *Professor Jenkinson*

- 5.6 The importance of providing students with guidance on how to engage with the course feedback process in a positive way and provide constructive criticism was stressed. It was suggested that one way in which to get students to engage with the course evaluation process in a positive way would be to ask them to nominate staff who had made a difference to them/their studies.

6 Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic)

- 6.1 In considering the revised Code of Practice on Student Discipline, members noted that instances of alleged collusion would now be handled in the same way as cases where plagiarism was alleged, ie, within the School, with the penalty for first offenders being determined by the Head of School who would also provide the student with feedback and advice on how to avoid plagiarism/collusion. It was observed that in cases where collusion was alleged, this was often due to the student not understanding the difference between group work and individual work. Members suggested that there would be merit in including an explanation of collusion/the boundaries between authorised group work and collusion in course handbooks.
- 6.2 The revised Code also separated out the process for handling cases where contract cheating was alleged, and made clear the seriousness of the offence, the standard outcome for students found guilty being expulsion from the University. It was noted that the Code stated that the term contract cheating was used to denote "the submission of work by a student that has been produced by someone other than that student with the intention to deceive." This covered work prepared by a commercial service for which the student had signed a contract and instances where an assessment was written by a family member/friend.
- 6.3 Although accepting the standard outcome for students found guilty of contract cheating reflected the seriousness of the offence, some members voiced concern over the harshness of the penalty. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that where the Head of School decided

that contract cheating may have taken place, the case would be referred on to Registry and a Disciplinary Hearing arranged. The Disciplinary Investigating Officer hearing the case had the discretion to impose a lesser or alternative penalty where there were mitigating circumstances and it was thought appropriate.

6.4 Members also noted:

- the definition of self-plagiarism as stated in the Code, namely “the duplication of work for assessment by submitting coursework containing material identical, or substantially similar, to material which has already been submitted by the same student for any other assessment.”;
- that the definition of other forms of cheating was given under section 3.5 of the Code and that it had been proposed that the wording of sub-section 3.5(h) be revised by removing the words “providing one’s own work for another student to use for an assessment”. This change would mean that section 3.5(h) would read “producing work for another student to use”, and
- it was possible that the definition of research misconduct, as set out in section 3.6 of the Code might change in future as the Research Committee had recently produce a revised definition.

6.5 Members were reminded of the feedback services provided by both Student Learning Service (SLS) and Careers Service staff and the help available to students via the [Achieve and Achieve+ pages](#) on Toolkit. SLS staff could work with a student on improving their academic writing skills by reviewing a piece of work which had been already been marked and returned to the student and providing feedback to improve future performance. The Careers Service also offered a feedback service for draft applications.

7 Disability Provision: Exam Scheduling and Location

7.1 Members noted the contents of the paper setting out the issues associated with the increase in the number of students with provisions which had a requirement of one exam per day. The increasing number of students with this provision presented significant challenges for the Central Timetabling Team when creating an exam timetable that accommodated these adjustments. Schools were also impacted.

7.2 It was reported that the paper had been discussed at the UCTL and that the intention was to establish a Working Group to look at the issue and bring forward recommendations. Any member of the Committee interested in contributing to the Working Group was asked to contact the Convener.

Action: *Committee members*

8 Forward Planning for 2019/20

8.1 The Convener advised members that planning for next year’s Committee schedule had commenced. She invited members to contact her should there be any items which they felt the Committee should consider during the course of the next academic year. Suggestions made were (i) joint degrees and (ii) space planning.

Action: *Committee members*

9 AOCB

9.1 There were no matters arising.

FOR INFORMATION

10 Senate Digest

The contents of the [Senate Digest](#) for the 20 March 2019 meeting of Senate were noted.

11 University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL)

The agenda for 22 April 2019 meeting of the [UCTL](#) was noted.

12 Dates of Next Meetings

It was noted that meetings of the Committee for the 2019/2020 academic year were scheduled as follows:-

Monday, 21 October 2019

Committee Room 2, University Office

Tuesday, 10 December 2019

F61 Edward Wright Building

Thursday, 6 February 2019

Committee Room 2, University Office

Monday, 23 March 2020

Committee Room 2, University Office.