

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

**Minute of Meeting Held on 8 June 2020**

**Present:** Abbe Brown (Chair), Euan Bain, Leigh Bjorkvoll, Jason Bohan, Justin Borg-Barthet, Stuart Durkin, Ewan Grant, William Harrison, Gerry Hough, Tracey Innes, Natalie Kinchin-Williams, David McCausland, Gordon McEwan, Tim Mighall, Michelle Pinard, Shona Potts, with Pat Rowand (Clerk) and Craig Stewart in attendance.

**Apologies:** Ruth Taylor

**1. Minute of Meeting Held on 5 May 2020**

1.1 The minute of the meeting held 5 May 2020 was confirmed as an accurate record.

**2. Matters Arising**

2.1 **Minute 4.3** At the last meeting of the Committee uncertainty had been expressed as to whether all Schools had been (i) aware of the 24 April deadline for providing students with information on the alternative assessment plans being put in place and (ii) provided with information on students with mitigating circumstances. Clarification had been obtained and it was understood that Schools were now aware of the options open to them, including the possibility of providing students with mitigating circumstances more than one assessment opportunity prior to the beginning of the new academic year.

2.2 **Minute 4.12** Abbe advised that she had relayed to Ruth Taylor the points raised at the last meeting of the Committee with respect to the fact that Directors of Teaching and Learning (DoTLs) felt side-lined. Ruth had been in separate dialogue with the DoTLs and more regular meetings with DoTLs had been organised as a result.

2.3 **Minute 5.3 and 5.4** Members were advised that some of the issues which had been raised regarding the timetable for graduations had been addressed via the publication of the timetable for academic year 2020/2021 which had now been considered by Senate.

2.4 As the minute from the last meeting of Senate was not yet publicly available members queried whether the decision on holding November graduations had been communicated to the wider University community and sought clarification on whether deadlines for the return of marks would be impacted. Members also asked for an update in regard to whether there would be an additional opportunity for graduation in September, as had previously been mooted, as this had not been included in the timetable. Abbe undertook to raise these questions with the Academic Registrar and report back to the Committee.

**Action:** Abbe Brown

[Clerk's Note:

The Academic Registrar has advised that there will be a September graduation, towards the end of the month, to allow for any final year student who may have to take resits as a result of COVID. Members are advised that there should be no issue with marking dates as the deadline for results is 31 August 2020. There will also be an *in-absentia* graduation in November, likely to be held on a date later than currently scheduled. Discussions are ongoing in regard to an amended result deadline to take into account both the November graduation date and the later start date in September.]

### **3. Report on the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Focus Group (TFG) and Other TFGs**

- 3.1** Abbe reported that a lot of positive progress had been made since the last meeting of the Undergraduate Committee. The concerns regarding transparency of meetings and membership of the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG) and its workstreams had been addressed. Information on the work of the group and its workstreams, including details of membership, was now available via a weblink which all colleagues could access.
- 3.2** It was stressed that the BLITFG had been formed to aid Schools in making decisions regarding the delivery of blended learning. Some of its other activities were now moving to a more operational phase, including orientation and the structure for the 2020/2021 academic year.
- 3.3** Open sessions– one with Ruth Taylor and a second with Ruth Taylor and Dariya Koleva – had already taken place and further open sessions were planned, including one involving Abbe, Nick Edwards and Duncan Stuart.

### **4. Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment**

- 4.1** A draft version of the Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment document was shared with Committee. Abbe advised that this particular draft had been superseded as a revised version had been submitted to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) for comment. Ongoing comments were also being sought from BLITFG. The paper, and comments from EDIC, will be shared with the UCTL on 22 June 2020. The Undergraduate Committee will be kept informed.
- 4.2** The Committee discussed references in the EDIA to captioning. This had been discussed at the last BLITFG meeting and it was noted that while recognising that there are legal obligations, there is some concern as to how this is to be brought about. In particular, there are issues regarding associated workload implications, and although there were tools which could automatically produce captioning, these could often be flawed. The software's ability to understand local accents and the captioning of mathematical proofs and foreign languages were of particular concern. It was understood that the newest iteration of Panopto should address some auto-captioning concerns and it was suggested that training in the new system should be prioritised.
- 4.3** Abbe said that her view was that there was no expectation that staff should manually caption content if auto-captioning was not viable. It was also unclear how legacy material used for teaching would be impacted by the legal requirement to provide captioning. Members of the Committee were unclear how Blackboard Ally would tie-in with the captioning requirement, particularly as it was understood that this would not work on the MBChB and Dentistry Blackboards. It was noted that it would be helpful to have clarity as to the nature, scope and timing of the new obligations. Abbe undertook to get clarification on these points.

**Action:** Abbe Brown

- 4.4** Given lack of clarity about when the obligations to caption become relevant and uncertainty as to what can be delivered by the new version of Panopto, members asked whether there should be advice to staff to defer captioning of their material. Abbe undertook to establish the institutional position on this and to report back to the Committee on this as soon as possible.

**Action:** Abbe Brown

4.5 The possible impact of blended learning on religious belief and the ability to attend services was noted.

## 5. AOCB

### 5.1 Reinstating C6/C7 for Summer 2020 Teaching

Members were informed that a group, chaired by Kath Shennan, had been established to review how the institution would assess student engagement in the context of blended learning delivery, and how this could be implemented using technological resources, such as the retention centre within MyAberdeen. Frameworks were in development prior to feedback being sought from Schools. The group was also looking to make the centralised communications sent to students about lack of engagement more supportive than currently was the case.

5.2 For courses which are currently running the intention was to reinstate the C6/C7 monitoring procedure as an official means to contact students whose lack of engagement was a cause of concern. It was confirmed that some undergraduate field courses were currently under way and it was noted that C6s were also useful for Postgraduate block taught courses. Colleagues were asked to make Abbe aware of any ongoing undergraduate teaching so that she could advise Kath Shennan of these instances. Courses were identified from Biological Sciences and from Geosciences.

**Action:** Abbe Brown/ DoTLs

5.3 In response to a query, confirmation was given that Tier 4 students were still required to sign in although it was noted that many Tier 4 students had opted to return home. Abbe confirmed that Registry are engaged with this issue and how it is evolving.

## For Information

### 6. Centralised University Orientation

6.1 As the University moves towards blended learning delivery for 2020/21, changes in terms of how induction could be delivered for new students were being planned. The Committee noted the contents of the Student Experience Directorate's paper on the plans for a centralised University orientation (induction). Members were advised that the orientation plan had been circulated to Schools via the Administrative Officers and members were encouraged to submit comments on the proposals and content for the programme.

### 7. University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL)

7.1 Committee members' attention was drawn to the agenda for the [28 April 2020](#) meeting of the UCTL. UCTL would meet next on 22 June 2020, with Senate taking place on 18 June 2020.

### 8. Date of Next Meeting

8.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee was due to take place at 2 pm on Monday, 19 October 2020. There was agreement amongst the Committee that there would be value in meeting earlier than this. It was proposed that meetings be held in mid-August and mid-September. It was remitted to Abbe and Pat to identify suitable dates for the Committee to meet. The Committee was also reminded that the Microsoft Teams page would remain open for discussion outside of meetings.

**Action:** Abbe Brown/Pat Rowand

**8.2** Abbe reported that further dates for the Committee had been set but that she was looking to change the dates of two of these so that they could take place on a Wednesday afternoon, in line with the discussions which had taken place at an earlier meeting of the Committee.

**Action:** Abbe Brown/Pat Rowand