

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 5th December 2014

Present: Professor S Davies (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Dr J Cai, Ms K Christie, Ms A Buckle, Mr R Henthorn, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr M Law, Professor A Lumsden, Dr G McEwan, Professor P McGeorge, Dr J Perkins, Dr M Pinard, Dr K Shennan, Dr D Smith, Professor R Wells, Dr D Wood,

Apologies: Mr D Auchie, Mrs J Bruce, Dr R Miller

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2014

- 1.1 It was queried whether Schools have autonomy in relation to section 4.3 which outlines the Committee's agreement that marks for overseas study should be used in Honours classification. The Committee was informed that the Committee's recommendation that marks for overseas study should be used in Honours classification went to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.

[**Clerk's Note:** The issue is still ongoing and is currently being discussed in other fora.]

- 1.2 The Committee approved the minutes of the meetings held on 10th October as an accurate representation of discussions held.

(copy filed as UG/051214/001)

ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW

(copy filed as UG/051214/002)

- 2.1 Dr Kathleen Shennan, Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) outlined the Annual Course Review (ACR) process which had been amended in response to demand from Schools for more ownership of the process and for simplification of the process. One of the amendments was the introduction of a discipline summary sheet which was to be completed by the Heads of Discipline and summarised the individual ACRs. The Committee was informed that QAC reviewed these and found a variety of quality of responses. The Committee was informed that QAC is there to ensure quality of courses and that unless this process was fully engaged with and detailed responses were submitted it is not possible for QAC to assure the quality of the University's programmes.
- 2.2 Dr Shennan outlined the variety of responses received saying that some very good, reflective commentaries were received, however some commentaries were minimal leaving very little content for QAC to review. The Committee was also informed that some disciplines had not submitted commentaries for certain half-sessions. As such, Members of QAC felt that they could not assure the quality of the areas concerned. Dr Shennan asked the Committee what they felt was contributing to the lack of engagement with the ACR process.
- 2.3 The Committee discussed potential reasons for the lack of engagement in the process. It was suggested that returning the forms with comments and examples of good practice might be enough to correct inadequacies. Other members suggested that it may be the case that those filling out the forms are unsure as to what is expected of them and that the use of the word 'commentary' may not effectively reflect what is required. It was suggested that this matter could be raised at Heads of School meeting given Heads of School sign off on

summaries produced by Heads of Discipline. The Committee agreed that it would be useful to return the forms with feedback and with useful examples of good practice.

- 2.4 The Committee discussed the potential implications if after the agreed action has been taken forms are still not being produced to an acceptable standard. The Committee was informed that it is important that the University is able to demonstrate a clear route of assurance as it is a requirement of the Quality Assurance Agency. Furthermore a lack of such a route may have implications on funding the University receives from the Student Funding Council (SFC). It was suggested that the procedure for those courses whose quality cannot be assured ought to be the same as those programmes whose quality cannot be assured via the Internal Teaching Review process, which is that those programmes are not re-validated. The view was expressed however that it would not be the same to deny a course validation for not correctly completing a form as it is to deny a programme validation for not meeting academic standards.

OUTCOME AGREEMENTS

(copy filed as UG/051214/003)

- 3.1 The Committee was presented with a First-Draft of an Outcome Agreement with the SFC by the Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching. The Committee was informed that this public document is a contract that would form an important part of the University's relationship with the SFC as it will outline what the University plans to deliver in return for its funding from the SFC. The Vice-Principal emphasised the importance of the document given that the University will be responsible for generating targets and 50% of the University's income comes from the SFC.
- 3.2 The Committee discussed the awareness of this document with members suggesting that too few staff are aware of its significance and raising awareness of the importance of the document may bring about more staff input. The Committee noted the importance of targets being filtered down to School level, given the Institution is the sum of school activity. The Committee was informed that Schools will have individual targets.
- 3.3 The Committee noted with concern issues regarding the transition of articulating students from college to University as well as student background, learning styles and assessment styles. Anne Buckle, Head of Strategic Planning, said that those issues have been flagged to the SFC as well as lack of control over recruitment to those colleges. The Committee also noted concern in relation to level of skills in Mathematics among students which has been raised by a number of disciplines including engineering and computing within the institution.
- 3.4 The Committee discussed the need to increase postgraduate research students. The Committee was informed that this is required to show the Scottish Government how Higher Education is helping the economy and to give an overview of the sector. The Committee was also informed the need for the University to look at increasing overseas numbers although targets for these have not been set by the SFC.

REVIEW OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION PAPER

(copy filed as UG/051214/004)

- 4.1 The Committee was asked to consider to the consultation paper noting the strengths of the current approach as well as new perspectives on QEF's approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

- 4.2 The Committee was asked to explore in particular the Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process, Quality Assurance Agency processes, outcome agreements as well as issues surrounding public information. It was suggested that the ELIR process is not capable of capturing all the good things the institution does but is beneficial as valuable student input is incorporated into the process.
- 4.3 The Committee was informed that a response to the paper is due by the 6th February 2015 and that the QEF's approach to quality assurance will not be reviewed again for 5 years. The Committee is asked for any comments relating to the consultation paper to be forwarded on to Katja Christie, Deputy Academic Registrar at katja.christie@abdn.ac.uk.

Action: Members of Committee

LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR MYABERDEEN

- 5.1 The Committee noted Schools' increasing dependency on MyAberdeen for business critical issues such as return of marks, and discussed some recent problems that had arisen with this. The view was expressed by Committee members that the MyAberdeen team are very supportive however they are stretched which has limited their ability to address all issues regarding support for MyAberdeen. The Committee noted the need for a well-resourced CAD team that would provide robust support for MyAberdeen. The Committee also noted issues surrounding continuous changes in the process which has been detrimental to some Schools who are having to continuously amend guidance for staff and students. The Committee discussed the ways in which MyAberdeen can be useful in terms of monitoring engagement which can allow the institution to address problems such as retention.

SENAS REVISIONS

(copy filed as UG/051214/005)

- 6.1 The Committee was informed that revisions to the SENAS process are being explored given there are issues with the current process namely that it is repetitive, slow and not sufficiently flexible to meet the demands of the rapidly changing environment. The Committee noted that the process serves three main functions: Quality Assurance; Strategic Oversight; Curriculum and Timetabling. The view was expressed that Quality Assurance and Strategic Planning can happen at any time and the only aspect of the process that was time-limited was Timetabling.
- 6.2 The Committee discussed how the process could be more streamlined with the suggestion being made that instead of requiring two school sign-offs, only one would be required removing a layer from the process. It was proposed that minor changes would not be reviewed by QAC, instead these would be triaged by the Registry. This would reduce the volume of changes to be reviewed by QAC and would speed up the process.
- 6.3 The Committee discussed the proposed changes to the SENAS process. The Committee noted concerns that Heads of School will have to look at forms more thoroughly as well as problems that have been encountered with the SENAS form. It was also suggested that although strategic planning itself may not be time-limited, the marketing of programmes is due to the University prospectus and UCAS coding and that this should be incorporated into the process. The Committee noted concerns of some members regarding the ability of the Registry to recognise minor changes as well as concerns relating to those courses which

appear on numerous programmes. It was suggested that an individual would have to bear the responsibility of informing all programmes that would be affected by a course change.

DATES OF NEXT MEETING

- 7.1 The next meeting of the Undergraduate Committee will take place Wednesday 1 April 2014 at 2pm in the Court Room, University Office.