

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 16 October 2015

Present: Professor S Davies (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Mrs J Bruce, Dr J Cai, Ms K Christie, Dr P Davidson, Professor R Evans-Jones, Professor J Geddes, Dr W Harrison, Professor A Lumsden, Professor R Millar, Dr J Perkins, and Mr M Fullerton (Clerk).

Apologies: Mr D Auchie, Mr L Fuller, Dr A Graham, Dr A Hartley, Miss Z Howell, Professor A Jenkinson, Professor G McEwan, Professor P McGeorge, Professor R Patey, Professor M Pinard, Professor R Wells, and Dr A Widfeldt.

Minute of the Meeting held on 1 April 2015

1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 1 April 2015, subject to a few minor typographical revisions.

[Action: Clerk]

Matters Arising

1.2 The Committee noted that there would be a delay in the delivery of the new Professional Skills courses, presented at the Committee's previous meeting, but that these would still be offered during the current academic year.

1.3 The status of the amendments to the AQH relating to marking and moderation was queried by a member of the Committee. The Committee noted that this was to be re-submitted to the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 21 October 2015.

Remit and Composition

2.1 It was agreed that the remit and composition of the Undergraduate Committee should remain unchanged, subject to an updated membership list.

[Action: Clerk]

Institutional Student Engagement Survey

3.1 The Committee discussed the proposal that the University adopts the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in place of the current Institutional Student Survey (ISS).

3.2 Some members of the Committee questioned the need for an additional survey while the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF) was being used. It was pointed out that the NSSE would focus on the student experience as a whole, rather than individual courses, and was therefore intended to serve a different function.

3.3 The Committee expressed concern that there may be a danger of survey fatigue were the NSSE introduced, particularly for those also completing the National Student Survey (NSS).

3.4 Looking to the content of the NSSE's questionnaire, the Committee felt that the terminology used could be misleading, as questions presumably designed to gain a student's opinion regarding their degree programme instead referred to their 'course'. The Committee therefore felt that establishing the most common terminology used by students was important in order to avoid confusion.

3.5 The Committee noted that, at the most recent meeting of the Heads of School, the President for Education & Employability had voiced support for the proposal.

3.7 The Committee gave the proposal its cautious support but noted that the success of the NSSE would be largely based on the support which it received from the student body.

Student Experience Paper 2015

4.1 The Committee noted that discussions are taking place within the College of Arts & Social Sciences aimed at improving the student experience by introducing more prescribed elements to degree programmes. It is hoped that the proposed changes, currently being piloted by parts of the School of Divinity, History, and Philosophy, will still accommodate enough breadth of choice to allow students to change their degree programme while also improving retention. It was however suggested that such changes could be a concern for smaller disciplines feeling 'edged out' as a result.

4.2 The Committee acknowledged the findings of the Student Experience Paper, particularly in relation to the poorer retention at level 1 across all areas, excluding the School of Engineering and the School of Medicine & Dentistry.

4.3 Some members of the Committee expressed surprise at the figures and suggested that it would be helpful to see these broken down by domicile.

[Clerk's note: Detailed retention data for each School, broken down by domicile is provided to Schools each year via the Annual Retention Analysis.]

4.4 The Committee suggested that the final table , Appendix D: Average Entry Tariff, is made less helpful by the return of data for the new School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition, as this will mask the large difference between high entry tariffs for medicine students and lower tariffs for medical sciences students.

New Student Pre-arrival Information, Registration, and Induction

5.1 In providing general feedback relating to registration, the Committee noted that technologically savvy students had the most success in using the newly introduced systems, MyCurriculum and MyTimetable, while it was felt that there was not enough support provided for other students, including those with special needs.

5.2 The Committee noted administrative staff dealt with a high volume of queries throughout registration, while academic staff did not receive nearly as many course-specific queries as expected.

5.3 The Committee noted that while triage measures had been set up to manage student queries during registration, these were felt to have had a limited effect. Some members indicated that students were in some cases provided with incorrect information and that queries which they had expected to be directed to the Schools were seemingly answered elsewhere. It was suggested that it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the triage measures without more details about the queries received.

5.4 The Committee noted that some Schools, particularly the School of Psychology, had made extensive use of social media to provide support to students during registration. It was felt that one of the biggest shortcomings of MyCurriculum was that, in the absence of Advisers of Study, students did not have enough direct contact with staff, and the use of social media was seen as an effective

means of humanising the new system. The Committee acknowledged that, while this particular approach may not suit all students, the availability of some form of personal advice was needed.

5.5 Some members expressed regret at the absence of the academic Welcome Fayre as part of Freshers' Week activities, which it was felt had been a useful opportunity for students to enquire about their upcoming studies. It was suggested that a similar role could be fulfilled by the Schools' respective induction events, the effectiveness of which appeared to have varied, but most were felt to have proven successful. Schools with established induction events noted difficulty in communicating with new students to make them aware of when these occurred.

5.6 Members of the Committee were asked for feedback in relation to the experience of personal tutors so far this year. It was noted that there had been a number of technical issues which had made it difficult to arrange meeting with students. In one instance, a member sent e-mails to their tutees manually because they were unable to do so via the new system. Student engagement was also a matter of concern, with a significant number of returning students not attending appointments with their personal tutors.

5.7 The Committee noted the capped course allocation system appeared to have caused students a great deal of disappointment and confusion.

5.8 The impact of MyCurriculum was discussed by the Committee, who noted that many students had encountered difficulty in using the new system. The Convener requested that Schools provide further feedback regarding any MyCurriculum-related matters to the OneSource Student Lifecycle Project Team (studentlifecycle@abdn.ac.uk).

[Action: All]

Items for Information

6.1 Members of the Committee noted the latest dates for the return of examination results for 2015-16.

6.2 Members of the Committee were reminded that, as detailed in paragraph 7.3.4 of the Academic Quality Handbook, details of School timetables for ensuring that all examination papers are approved by the External Examiner should be sent to Registry (academicservices@abdn.ac.uk) by 30 October.

Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The next meeting of the Undergraduate Committee will be held on Friday 4 December 2015 at 2.00pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.

AOCB

8.1 Members of the Committee were asked to provide feedback on the new class representative system. Responses identified low levels of student engagement as a key issue. It was suggested that part of the reason for this was the requirement by the new system that candidates for the role submit a supporting statement, which was seen to discourage interested students. The Committee noted that some Schools had returned to the previous method of requesting volunteers during classes to ensure that the role was being filled.

[Action: Clerk to feedback to President for Education and Employability.]

8.2 The Committee noted that the start date of 2nd half session, which did not officially allow for a dedicated induction period for new students, would be considered by UCTL at its October meeting.