

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

Minute of the Meeting held on 1st April 2015

Present: Professor S Davies (Convener), Mr D Auchie, Dr P Bishop, Mrs J Bruce, Dr J Cai, Dr P Davidson, Mr P Fantom, Mr R Henthorn, Mrs T Innes, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr M Law, Professor A Lumsden, Dr G McEwan, Professor P McGeorge, Dr M Pinard, Dr R Patey, Dr K Shennan, Professor R Wells, Dr A Wildfelt, Dr D Wood, Ms C McWilliams (Clerk)

Apologies: Dr R Miller

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2015

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meetings held on 5th December as an accurate representation of discussions held.

(copy filed as UG/01042015/001)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

- 2.1 The Committee received a presentation from Mr Peter Fantom and Mrs Tracey Innes from the Careers Service providing an overview of the proposals for professional development courses for undergraduate students.
- 2.2 The Committee noted that the driver behind these proposals is to improve student employability, to encourage students to consider their career beyond their studies earlier and to enable the Careers Service to reach a wider group of students. The Committee was informed that it is the intention of the University for these courses to be compulsory for students by way of 0 credit courses on an online platform. The courses being developed are intended to last for two hours and relate to careers, equality and diversity as well as health and safety. The Committee was shown how students would be able to access course information and a pre-course quiz via a demonstration using the online platform for the course entitled 'Graduate Attributes'.
- 2.3 The Committee was informed that course assessments will be automatically assessed. After having failed the course, the students will thereafter receive feedback on their incorrect answers and will have another opportunity to pass the course assessment.
- 2.4 The Committee was invited to discuss the proposals and provide feedback for consideration. While all were in favour of the principle of the proposals, some members voiced concern with the topic of 'Health and Safety' which was argued to be subject-specific and not an appropriate topic to be taught on a cross-discipline basis. Some members also expressed concern in relation to the compulsory nature of these courses and the implications for those students who fail. Mr Fantom informed the Committee that where students have failed or did not take up a course, it would not be realistic to deny students' graduation therefore it is more likely that this would just be reflected in students' transcripts as N (not achieved).
- 2.5 The Committee discussed the initiatives that other areas of the University undertake in relation to employability and whether that information could be made available to students via the online platform. The Committee was informed that there would be a virtual library available for students to access which could contain links to those initiatives. The Committee

agreed that it would be useful to collate information relating to other initiatives ongoing in other areas of the University and that the programme advisory board conveners might be asked to do this. The Committee also noted the suggestion that Freshers' Week as well as Personal Tutors could help in highlighting these courses to students.

- 2.6 The Committee discussed the relevance of these courses to mature students, particularly those who have had extensive experience in their careers. Whilst it was suggested that some students may get an exemption from doing the course, the general view of the Committee was that it would be difficult to justify the significant resource that would be required to identify which students should be exempt. However, the Committee was informed that the pre-course quiz that students undertake prior to the course could be developed so to help in identifying those students for whom the course may not be relevant.

MODERATION AND MARKING

(copy filed as UG/01042015/002)

- 3.1 The Committee was asked to consider the proposed amendments to the University policy on marking and moderation which seeks to ensure appropriate minimum criteria for marking and moderation of marking are clearly stipulated. The Committee was also asked to consider practises at the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews and Glasgow. The Committee noted the current marking and moderation practises at the University whereby all borderline scripts and a minimum of 10% of marker's scripts, including all significant borderline grades, are double marked. [*Academic Quality Handbook section 7.8.2*].
- 3.2 The Committee was informed that the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) had been asked to consider marking and moderation practises by some External Examiners (EE) as well as University staff who found the level of moderation at the University to be onerous and higher compared to other institutions. The amendments proposed by QAC were as follows:

For assessments at levels 3, 4 and 5:

- A minimum requirement for second marking will include all borderline fails and 10% (random sampling) of all work (continuous assessment and exam scripts) that contributes to the final grade for a course. Second marking is defined as either double marking or double blind marking. A discipline may determine which method of second marking is appropriate.
- All dissertations (or work of equal standing) and any single piece of in-course assessment that contributes 100% of the total marks for a course, of 15 SCQF credit points or more should also be second marked.
- Any work that contains no subjective elements (i.e. mathematically based with clearly defined marking scheme or multiple choice questions) need not be second marked but all such scripts could be checked to ensure accuracy of the final mark.

For assessments at levels 1 & 2

- There should be some form of moderation of marks and should also occur if a single assessment constitutes 20% or more of the final course grade.

- 3.3 Discussions ensued as to the implications of the proposed amendments to the marking and moderation practises within different areas of the University. The Committee noted discrepancies in views as to whether the purpose of second marking is to check the overall marking of the marker i.e. the process, or whether it is to ensure the agreement of a mark for a particular script. Those who were of the view that it is the marking that is being

reviewed, argued that where there is a definite line of disagreement, i.e. one marker changed the degree classification for a number of scripts in the same direction, this should trigger a discussion relating to this discrepancy between the markers. Some members reported already having a system similar to what is being proposed and that few problems had been encountered. Other members reported having experience of meetings between markers and that this was effective in ironing out any problems.

- 3.4 The Committee discussed section 5.1 of Appendix D relating to what contribution assessed work that cannot be easily seen by an EE should have to the overall course mark. The Committee noted the view of some that 10% was too low and unrealistic for those subjects where overall assessments are heavily comprised of laboratory work and presentations. It was suggested that a specified figure may not be appropriate and instead the EE should have evidence (eg marking/feedback sheets) as to how marks for assessments they cannot see, were determined.
- 3.5 The Committee discussed the requirements for moderation at Non-Honours level. Some members were of the view that to state moderation as good practice and thereafter stipulate instances when it should always occur was contradictory. As such the Committee recommended that section 2.1 of Appendix D should be changed to merely state moderation of marks as good practice and to remove any further requirements. The Committee recommended therefore that a full stop should be inserted after the terms 'good practice' in section 2.1 and the rest of the content should be removed.
- 3.6 The Committee discussed whether borderline fails should always be second marked. It was argued that they should be particularly at non-honours level as it is more of an issue of achieving credits than of marks. Other members were also of the view that it is re-assuring for students who have failed to inform them that their script has been looked at by several people.
- 3.7 The Committee sought clarification as to whether the requirement for 10% sample of scripts to be second marked was 10% of each marker's scripts or 10% of the entire cohort. The Committee was informed that a 10% sample of each marker's scripts would require to be second marked. It was suggested that this may not be practicable for those subjects that have numerous markers.
- 3.8 The Committee agreed in principle to the aims of the proposed amendments to the University's current marking and moderation practises. However the Committee was of the view that the wording in Appendix D is required to be amended to ensure the essence of the practise is effectively captured. The Committee was also of the view that the proposals acting as a minimum requirement for Schools could be further emphasised.

POLICY ON RECORDING OF LECTURES

(copy filed as UG/01042015/003)

- 4.1 The Committee discussed the proposed policy on lecturing recording. The Committee acknowledged that whilst such a policy may be difficult to enforce, it is important to have one in place so students are aware of what is deemed to be acceptable when recording lectures.
- 4.2 The Committee noted with concern the first footnote of the policy which details what the difference between a lecture and other learning fora is. The Committee was of the view that

the distinction needs to be clearer particularly in relation to seminars as these can be similar in class size to lectures.

- 4.3 The Committee discussed section 1.1 of the policy which makes reference to prior consent of 'others involved' being required. Some members of the Committee had differing views of who 'others involved' was actually referring to, with some believing it to be referring to other students and others believing it to be referring to guest lecturers. The Committee agreed that this needs to be clarified in the policy.
- 4.4 Discussions ensued as to the role of other students in the lectures that are being recorded. It was suggested that although prior consent may not be required from other students in a lecture, students should at least be informed if a recording is to take place. The Committee agreed that the policy should be changed to reflect this.
- 4.5 It was recommended that section 1.1 be amended to emphasise up-front that recordings can may be made for a student's own use only e.g. "*All students may, for their own use only, record any lecture given by any member of staff.*"

PERSONAL COMMENTS IN STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORMS

(copy filed as UG/01042015/003)

- 5.1 The Committee discussed the requirements for removing the identity of any staff members who are the subjects of personal comments prior to circulation of Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF). The Committee noted the concerns of some members that redacting SCEF forms may lead to redacting potentially useful feedback. The Committee also discussed who would be responsible for the redaction of personal comments. The Committee agreed that it was necessary for Schools to identify mechanisms for redacting SCEF forms. The Committee also noted the need to ensure that staff members are not redacting feedback for their own courses.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed what is meant by personal comments and whether this would include positive personal comments. The Committee was of the view that the wording of the policy needs to be changed so to reflect that it is abusive and derogatory comments that the policy is targeting.

PROVISIONAL MARKS

(copy filed as UG/01042015/005)

- 6.1 The Committee discussed the proposals that all first half-session results are considered to be provisional until they are confirmed at a full meeting of examiners later in the year. Some members of the Committee were concerned that some students would not be aware of what a 'provisional' mark is. The Committee agreed that students need to be educated as to what this means and need to be informed that this will be applicable to all marks until they are ratified by the exam board.
- 6.2 The Committee recognised the merit of returning provisional January course where they would otherwise miss the deadline, but was anxious that the policy did not dissuade Schools from getting course results ratified before return wherever possible.

- 6.3 The Committee discussed Chapter B6 Indicator 17 of the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code which requires information to make clear what the further stages are in instances where marks are provisional. The Committee noted with concern the possibility that where marks are final, students will be informed they are only provisional and will therefore not be correctly informed as to what the further stages are.

DATES OF NEXT MEETING

- 7.1 The next meeting of the Undergraduate Committee will take place Friday 9 October 2015 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.