

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

## TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 22 October 2020.

**Present:** Mr J Dunphy (Convener), Mr E Akerele, Ms M Buchan, Dr K Burgess, Ms K Cross, Ms N Dave, Dr S Douglas, Ms L Gibbons-Wood, Dr M Goua, Mr B Jackson, Ms Sofia Marini, Dr K Martzoukou, Dr R McGregor, Ms J Nicol, Mr C Park, Ms J Pryor, Ms F Roberts, Dr J Scott, Ms J Strachan.

**Apologies:** Ms E Berrill, Ms A Du Plessis, Ms V Draghici, Dr S Henderson, Mr I Morrison, Mr C Park, Ms A Smart, Dr F Work, Ms D Wynne, Dr M Zarb, Dr Y Zhao

**In Attendance:** Ms L Barry (Secretary), Mr G Forbes, Mr T Lauterbach, Ms J Mifsud (for item 5).

**Action**

### 1. SHARING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The Convener welcomed the Sub-Committee to the first meeting of the session.

Committee members were asked to share their experiences of effective practice in Learning and Teaching since the last meeting.

Highlights from the discussion included: -

- The Law School noted that online staff student liaison group meetings saw increased attendance in comparison to attendance levels for on campus staff student liaison group meetings.
- The School of Health Science found that staff and students developed their skills in active engaged workshops online, utilising platforms such as MS Teams and Blackboard Collaborate. The School also highlighted the opportunity to enhance the student experience via engagement of external expert speakers who ordinarily wouldn't have been able to come to Aberdeen.
- The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice noted that additional support had been put in place to help students develop digital skills. Specific mention was made to commend the Online learning developers and the implementation of training for staff and students.
- The School of Creative and Cultural Business felt the online and on campus students coming together in shared sessions has been beneficial and noted that students were organising more online social groups, for example online reading groups to foster a feeling of community with this was working well.
- The School of Pharmacy and Life Science highlighted that their technical team had been working on revamping risk assessments and planning for students on campus.
- Whilst the Library is only open in a limited way, students have fed back that they were appreciative of this. The Library staff found that, on the whole, students have been compliant with social distancing and wearing masks, sanitising etc.
- The committee noted that where students are asked to interact in group work the use of MS Teams seemed to enable more effective interaction than on campus.
- Support departments have collaborated well together to help deliver online assessment. Technology has allowed staff and students to connect and given staff the ability to reach a wider audience of students.

- DELTA have provided student facing resources as part of the online welcome as well as a range of online staff development sessions to help with Moodle.
- The members noted that there had been an increase in staff skills to help prepare them for assessment. RGU were one of 3 Scottish HEIs who were able to run all assessments.
- The committee noted the increase on staff workloads and administration and thanked staff for their efforts. The committee also highlighted the work of Estate staff in making the campus safe and thanked them for their efforts.
- The committee also heard from student members who reiterated the benefit of the adaptation of digital learning and digital tools noting that while students previously had access to these, they were not always used to the full benefit. Students are now using these and can see great value in the ability to connect via MS Teams. Student members suggested that attendance and overall participation has increased as a result of moving online due to COVID-19.
- Students thanked staff for the amount of work that has gone on in the background to support their learning.
- Student Partnership work has been effective throughout lockdown and the shift to blended learning, with the level of interaction between staff and student representatives across the University being seen as a particular positive. As an example, the University's Executive has involved student representatives in the decision-making process through frequent dialogue allowing active contribution to planning the approach the return to campus and considerations of online and blended learning. Working in partnership with the Executive has ensured that the good decisions were made for the RGU community and the Student Union have endeavoured to support the University's response to COVID from the outset.

## 2. **REMIT AND COMPOSITION**

An extract from Organisational Regulation O4: *Standing Committees of Academic Council* concerning the remit and composition and the current Membership List of the Sub-Committee were noted.

Ms Fiona Roberts was asked and agreed to serve a further year as Vice-Convenor for Session 2020-21.

Secretary's Note:

*Following the meeting, subject to approval at QAEC, Ms Julie Strachan was asked and agreed to serve as acting head of DELTA until they appoint a replacement, and so she will assume Convenership of TLASC meantime.*

## 3. **MINUTE AND MATTERS ARISING**

The Minute of the meeting held on 15 April 2020 [reference TLASC/20/3] was approved.

Matters arising were considered on review of the Minute to which there were no comments.

## 4. **ASSESSMENT POLICY AND GUIDANCE**

### 4.1 **Sub-Committee Working Group**

It was discussed if the sub-committee Working Group would continue and if new Secretary members should be approached to join. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

Members were invited to consider two questions in relation to the University Grading Scheme.

1. What marking scheme is used within your School at module component level?
2. What is the rationale for using the particular marking scheme at module component level?

**The School of Health Science** use percentages for exams or elsewhere as appropriate. Other than that, the School utilise a grading matrix and alphabetical grade. The School moved to alphabetical grades when the University grading scheme changed from the 1-6 numerical scheme. The rationale is that the School uses criterion grading where it is appropriate.

**PALS** use percentages then conversion to a letter grade because the School has specific marking grids.

**The School of Creative and Cultural Business** have moved to letter grading for the 2020/21 Academic Session. The School noted that whilst there had been a steep learning curve the move should streamline the grading process for staff and avoid student dissatisfaction with perceived 'near misses', e.g. 68%.

**DELTA's** taught provision uses criterion-based grading aligned with the University grading scheme in most cases. The Pre-sessional English programme makes use of exams with objective questions to test students' reading and listening skills. These summative tests use percentages which are converted to a letter grade.

**School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice** use letter grades and for some exams percentages are converted to a letter grade.

**Aberdeen Business School** use percentage for both exams and coursework which is converted to grade using standard banding.

**The School of Law** use percentage which is converted to Grade A – F. Some modules have a 'participation' assessment component marked on a Pass/Fail basis.

This analysis will be collated for sharing with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC).

## 4.2 Alternative Assessment Arrangements

Collaborating with Schools and support departments including ITS, Timetabling, GAQ, and Inclusion, DELTA supported the implementation of Alternative Assessment Arrangements. DELTA were asked to review the endeavours of Semester 2 & 3 19/20 via a paper highlighting actions, lessons learned and opportunities for enhancement in 20/21.

The paper illustrated the scale of work that had been undertaken across the University, including:

- Production of alternative assessment guidelines (currently being updated for 20/21).
- Consultation and support mechanisms to help Schools implement policies and guidance.
- Extended assessment support for students, including: study skills sessions, online guidance resources, an ITS helpline, and additional measures for any students unable to submit their assessment via Campus Moodle.

Following the move to online assessment in Semester 2 of 19/20, 94% of students scheduled to undertake an online exam accessed these with the majority of those submit responses within the set timeframe.

The Convener asked School-based committee members about their experiences of alternative assessment to ascertain what might be improved for the next session. From this discussion: -

Schools valued the support received leading up to the assessments and technology had worked well, enabling creative uses of Panopto and MS Teams for example. However, a few issues were noted, such as:

- Technical issues related to large files
- Challenges associated with the short time frame of the rapid pivot to alternative online assessment meaning not all students were able to undertake a trial/test for the various formats of assessment prior to the exam period. This was noted as particularly important since practice opportunities help to increase student confidence and improve the process of checking in to the exam. Where practice opportunities were possible student feedback showed these helped students to feel assured about what they were doing

Work is underway to respond to these issues in advance of the Semester 1, 20/21 assessment period.

The committee noted alternative assessment arrangements worked well and that the designated DELTA contact was extremely helpful.

## 5. **TIMETABLING**

Members were asked to review a paper which outlined the proposed timetabling principles to be adopted regarding auto-scheduling of on campus and online examinations.

Jane Mifsud, Timetabling Manager, attended the meeting and discussed the proposal with members, explaining that the new proposal aimed to ensure better use of the estate, IT, Staff and room resources. It was explained that a timetabling Steering Group had been set up in order to fully prepare for the current Academic Session with the remit of this group being to advise on the implementation of auto-scheduling of the examination and teaching timetable.

In particular, the committee was asked for its view on whether exams should take place in two sittings or if the exam day should be extended to allow for three sittings.

Members raised concern regarding assessment upload time during online exams and whether the system could support the amount of data being uploaded at one time. It was explained that the maximum number of students uploading coursework within a 15-minute window to Moodle should be limited to 500 users and that this was reflected within the forthcoming Semester 1 20/21 exam timetable which had been manually constructed. It was further noted that there should be a natural staggering of uploads within a single exam as not all students will complete at the same time.

It was highlighted that the extra week leave offered by the University over Christmas 2020 impacted on the exam diet. Members agreed the extra week was well intentioned however, a number of teaching staff may not be able to utilise this extra time due to marking pressures and there is the hope that they will be able to carry it over. The Convener reminded members that the extra leave is a thank you to all staff as a gesture of good will and would not be removed.

All school-based committee members were encouraged to share the paper in their Schools and provide feedback to enhance the student experience. Emmanuel Akerele was asked to brief students on the paper, consider the consequences of the proposed Examination and Scheduling Principles and provide feedback on the student perspective.

Members

## 6. **UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING**

An update was given on activities in relation to the Partnership Objective. Committee members heard that the Partnership had met and discussed the progress of the objectives outlined in the current Student Partnership Agreement. It was noted that engagement with Student School Officers is variable across the University and it was agreed there should be more focus on involving Student School Officers throughout the year.

## 7. **QUALITY CODE MAPPING**

Committee members were asked to note that the QAA Quality Code Mapping was taking place. Particular attention was brought to the themes of Assessment and Learning and Teaching.

## 8. **DIGITAL ESTATE WORK**

This item was on the agenda for noting from the previous Session and no comments were made.

## 9. **DELTA STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

An update on the support that DELTA and the Inclusion Centre will be offering to Schools was given. Over the coming year, there will be work ongoing around staff development and enhancing the accessibility of online learning.

## 10. **FELLOWSHIP OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY**

The Committee noted the membership of the Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

The following colleagues have been recognised as fellows of the Higher Education Academy through the Professional Teaching Framework Experiential Programme since the last meeting: –

Ian Broadbent, formerly ABS (SFHEA)  
Anne Singleton, CCB (SFHEA)  
Jay Lytwynenko, SC (FHEA)

## 11. **AOCB**

No competent business was raised.

## 12. **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The date and time for the next meetings for Session 2020-21 were noted as follows:

- 26 January 2021 at 930am via MS Teams.
- 15 April 2021 at 930am with location TBC.

## 13. **VALEDICTORY**

On behalf of the Committee, Fiona Roberts thanked Mr James Dunphy for his support and input as Committee Convener and for his many years' service to the University. An update on the new Convener will follow in due course.