

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Minute of the meeting held on 14 October 2013

Present: Mr B Amponsah, Ms E Beever, Ms E Carlen, Ms J Chalmers, Ms K Christie (Clerk), Ms M Dunn, Dr L Foley, Mr L Forsyth, Mr R Henthorn, Mr G Hunter, Ms C Inglis, Dr M Mackie, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr M McCorkell, Professor P McGeorge, Mr R Murray, Ms E Nohe, Mrs J Shirreffs (Convener), Rev E Smart with Ms C McWilliams (Minutes)

Apologies: Mr B Snelling, Professor W Naphy, Professor R Wells, Mr A Wight

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Approval of Minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2013

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of 13 May 2013 were approved.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/01)

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Bank Letters to Students (Minute 3.3 refers)

2.1 The Committee noted that Halifax Bank of Scotland Head Office had reneged on their earlier agreement to accept the University's standard electronic bank letter for students, and so hard copy bespoke letters would continue to be produced for students as required. All other banks continued to accept the standard letter, although there had been some issues due to a lack of communication between Bank Management and front-line counter staff.

Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (Minute 7 refers)

2.2 The Committee noted that the first visit of the ELIR panel had taken place during 9-10 October 2013, with a second visit scheduled for the week of 18 November 2013.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/02)

3. Remit, Composition and Membership

3.1 The Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) queried the inclusion of the President of the Debater within the Committee Composition. The Clerk undertook to investigate.

Action: Clerk

3.2 A number of typographical errors were noted. The amended Remit and Composition for 2013-2014 can now be found at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/student-affairs-committee-646.php.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/03)

4. The Student Experience – Presentation by Professor Peter McGeorge

4.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) gave a presentation on 'The Student Experience' noting in particular student feedback from the 2012-2013 Institutional Student Survey (ISS), National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The Committee noted that response rates were not as high as the University would wish, but that mechanisms were being put in place to address this for the 2013-2014 surveys.

4.2 The Committee also noted that students had expressed some dissatisfaction in relation to both academic and non-academic support, but recognised that the implementation of Personal Tutors and the S4S Peer Mentoring Scheme, both of which were introduced for the 2013-2014 academic year, should help to address these issues.

4.3 The Committee further noted that whilst institutionally retention was at a 6-year low, there were significant differences between Schools and between levels of study and that action to address these differing cohorts was on-going.

4.4 The Committee briefly discussed the possible use of learning analytics such as known-metrics of student engagement (e.g. library, email and MyAberdeen access) to identify those students potentially

at risk. The Committee agreed that this idea had potential and noted that it would be discussed further within other fora.

Action: Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching)

5. Corporate Risk Register

5.1 The Committee noted the most recent updates regarding the 'Failure to Meet Student Expectations' Risk Register which is managed by the Director of Academic Affairs and the Director of Student Life.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/04)

5.2 The Committee suggested that actions to monitor and evaluate the Personal Tutoring System, and Peer Mentoring Scheme be added.

Action: Clerk

6. Aberdeen University Student's Association (AUSA)

New Academic Year Structure

6.1 The Committee noted that there had been informal discussions regarding the implementation of a half-term break in the middle of the first semester when the new Academic Year is implemented. As part of the discussions, it had been suggested that teaching might potentially start on the Thursday of Freshers' Week so to liberate two days in the middle of the term to facilitate the half-term break.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/05)

6.2 The Committee noted that AUSA, whilst being supportive of a half-term break, considered Freshers' Week to be the cornerstone for extra-curricular activity within the student community and expressed concern that this would be compromised. The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) emphasised that the suggestion of the mid-term break was not yet a formal proposal and that further discussions, where input from AUSA would be sought and welcomed, would be scheduled.

Student Maternity Policy

6.3 The Committee noted the Student Maternity Policy proposed by AUSA which was based on examples from the Universities of Leeds, Birmingham and Loughborough, whilst also closely following the model of the University of Aberdeen's Staff Maternity Policy. The document offers both information and support for students, both during pregnancy and after, together with a draft Student Support Plan checklist.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/06)

6.4 The Committee agreed that it was important that students (and staff) knew what support was available from the University regarding student pregnancy and maternity issues, and that it would be useful to bring all the material regarding student pregnancy into one student-friendly document. The Committee suggested this document was more of a guidance note than a policy. It also noted that clarity was required as to who would be responsible for completing the Student Support Plan with students.

Action: AUSA

6.5 The Committee further noted that the document would have to be considered by the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL).

Action: Clerk

Report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers

6.6 The Committee noted the report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/07)

6.7 The Committee also noted that the Director of Student Life would be acting on the University's behalf in relation to Health and Safety issues within the Students' Association.

6.8 The Rector expressed his concern regarding the extent to which he understood AUSA had been consulted regarding the presence of Starbucks on campus. The Committee noted that this issue had recently been discussed by the Operating Board of the University, and that AUSA had indeed been included in the consultation process. However, it was agreed that going forward there would be merit in AUSA and the University Administration discussing how best to ensure AUSA was brought into such consultative discussions in future.

Action: Student President, AUSA

7. Directorate of Student Life

7.1 The Committee noted the report from the Director of Student Life on recent activities within Campus Services, Student Support, the Chaplaincy, the Infohub, University Sport and the Careers Service, noting in particular:

- A successful move-in weekend had taken place in partnership with AUSA.
- An Employment Engagement Officer had been appointed to strengthen and build upon existing employer engagement provision.
- An interactive Careers Education course for level 1 students had been launched; course materials for levels 2, 3 and 4 were in development.
- The transfer of the University Sport & Exercise Team to the Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV) had not progressed. It was felt in the longer term that the University needed to retain a sports presence within its own structure.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/08)

7.2 The Committee requested that a future Student Affairs Committee meeting be held on the Hillhead Halls of Residence premises.

Action: Clerk

8. Directorate of Academic Affairs

8.1 The Committee noted the report from the Director of Academic Affairs on recent activities within the Registry and the Centre for Academic Development, which highlighted in particular that:

- The new Personal Tutor system had been rolled out across the University with effect from the start of term. The operation of the system would be monitored closely during the coming year.
- The changes made to the Student Absence Policy as noted previously by the SAC (May 2013) were now in place; a communication to students was being drafted.

Action: Director of Academic Affairs

- The Registry continued to be very actively engaged in the OneSource Student Lifecycle Project with a number of staff being seconded to work on the project team.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/09)

9. Internationalisation – The Role of the Chaplaincy

9.1. The Committee noted the Chaplaincy's intention to develop an internationalisation strategy. The University Chaplain would be pleased to receive any feedback in relation to the strategy as it currently stands.

Action: All

(copy filed as SAC/141013/10)

10. Equality and Diversity: Update on Activities

10.1 The committee noted the update in relation to the Equality and Diversity activities taking place within the institution, noting in particular that the first Equality and Diversity questionnaire for students would take place in November 2013.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/11)

11. One Source Update

11.1 The Committee noted an update on the OneSource project.

(copy filed as SAC/141013/12)

12. Dates of Meetings 2013/2014

12.1 The meetings in 2013/2014 will be held as follows in Committee Room 2, University Office:

- Monday 17 February 2014 at 2pm
- Monday 12 May 2014 at 2pm