

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Minute of the meeting held on 17 February 2014

Present: Rev M Anderson, Ms E Beever, Ms J Chalmers, Ms K Christie (Clerk), Dr L Foley, Mr L Forsyth, Mr R Henthorn, Mr G Hunter, Mrs C Inglis, Dr M Mackie, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr M McCorkell, Mrs J Shirreffs (Convener), Mr A Wight with Ms C McWilliams (Minutes)

Apologies: Mr L Bebbington, Ms E Carlen, Ms M Dunn, Professor P McGeorge, Professor W Naphy, Rev E Smart, Professor R Wells, Ms H West

1. Approval of Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2013

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of 14 October 2013 were approved.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/01)

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Enhancement-led Institutional Review (Minute 2.2 refers)

2.1 The Committee noted that the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Panel had visited the University in October and November 2013 and, in addition to reviewing our Reflective Analysis and Advance Information Set, had met with a series of groups of staff and students from across the institution.

2.2 It was further noted that the ELIR Panel's draft outcome report had been received. The Panel's overarching judgement concluded that **'The University of Aberdeen has effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.'** This is the most positive judgement an ELIR Panel can bestow, and means the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Remit, Composition and Membership (Minute 3.1 refers)

2.3 The Aberdeen University Student's Association (AUSA) had queried the inclusion of the President of the Debater within the composition of the Student Affairs Committee (SAC). Further to investigation, the Committee was informed that the SAC was established, in part, from the then Student Organisations Committee, and had met for the first time in October 2000. The minutes of Court record that on 27 June 2000, Court approved that the President of the Debater (in addition to the President of Charities campaign) be added to the list of those in attendance at meetings of the SAC. It is likely that this was to represent the historical position of the Debater being considered as a separate organisation to AUSA.

New Academic Year Structure (Minute 6.1 refers)

2.4 The Committee noted that the possibility of a mid-term break being considered for the 1st half-session of the new academic year 2014/15 was no longer being pursued.

3. Health and Safety

3.1 The Director of Student Life informed the Committee of plans to launch a student safety campaign. The Committee noted that the Directorate hoped to work with AUSA regarding student safety both on and off campus. It was further noted that the possibility of working with the Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen College, with a view to making the campaign a city-wide endeavour, was being considered.

4. Student Life: Presentation-Leith Forsyth, Director of Student Life

4.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Student Life providing an overview of all the professional service sections now contained within the Directorate.

4.2 The Committee noted that a key aim of the Sport and Exercise Team (SET) and the Directorate as a whole was to increase investment in sports clubs, to encourage students to develop further their skills and increase the number of students competing at national and international level. It was suggested that a possible source of funding to support this aim might be the Olympic Legacy Fund.

5. Corporate Risk Register

5.1 The Committee received the Corporate Risk Register 'Failure to Meet Student Expectations' which is managed by the Director of Academic Affairs and the Director of Student Life, and noted that it is to be a standing agenda item at future SAC meetings.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/02)

5.2 The Committee further noted that the recommendation from the last SAC meeting to include an action to monitor and evaluate the Personal Tutoring and Peer Mentoring schemes had been added. The Committee had no further recommendations to make at this juncture.

6. Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA)

University Sports Forum

6.1 The Committee received a proposal from AUSA to establish a University Sports Forum within which the bodies responsible for university sport, the SET, Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV) and Aberdeen University Sports Union (AUSU), can meet to discuss common issues.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/03)

6.2 The Committee noted that the idea of establishing a formal structure to facilitate cross-team discussion and working had been raised with the Head of SET and the Chief Executive Officer of ASV, both of whom were supportive of the idea.

6.3 The Committee endorsed the proposal and suggested the forum be a sub-group of the SAC. The Director of Student Life offered to take the initiative forward, together with the President for Sport. It was agreed that a draft remit and composition for the group, ensuring no duplication with the remit of the ASV Monitoring Group, would be considered at the next Meeting of SAC.

**Action: President for Sport,
Director of Student Life**

Absence Reporting and Self-certification for sports events.

6.4 The Committee noted that there was no formal absence reporting process for students who had to miss Wednesday morning classes to attend 'away' fixtures in central Scotland and beyond. As such students were being C6'd (unauthorised withdrawal/at risk) which had implications for retaining their class certificates.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/04)

6.5 The Committee, whilst supportive of students in this predicament, acknowledged that repeated absences were not desirable and potentially put at risk students' achievement of course learning outcomes.

6.6 Given the learning-related issues, the Committee felt that this was a matter for the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) and its Undergraduate and Postgraduate sub-committees. As such it was agreed that AUSA, with the support of the SAC, should raise the issue via the next cycle of meetings of UCTL.

Action: President for Sport

Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Leave Policy

6.7 The Committee received a revised version of AUSA's proposed Student Maternity, Maternity Support and Adoption Leave Policy, first tabled at SAC on 13 October 2013.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/05)

6.8 The Committee noted AUSA's intention to develop a student-parent handbook to accompany the policy. The Committee also noted that, as a pre-cursor to being considered by UCTL and its sub-committees, the proposed policy was currently being considered by College Teaching and Learning Committees and that College feedback, to date, had been positive.

6.9 The Committee reiterated its support for providing students (and staff) with a student-friendly document detailing the support available from the University regarding student pregnancy and maternity issues, but had some concern regarding the amount of detail required from students (and timing thereof) in particular within the proposed student support plan. It was also suggested that a 'guidance document' as opposed to a 'policy' might be a better way forward given the policies already in place for students with children and dependents. Additionally, given that much of the detail required for the student support plan might be considered quite sensitive, it was felt important to consider carefully the implications of some of the questions that might be asked and by whom.

6.10 Given the interest of AUSA in related childcare/dependant issues it was agreed that the Head of Student Support Services would establish a short-term working group (to include representatives from AUSA, Policy, Planning and Governance, Student Support and the Rocking Horse Nursery) to take a more holistic look at all such issues, to ascertain the most appropriate way forward as regards guidance for students. It was agreed that the working group would meet in March with a view to reporting to the May 2014 meeting of UCTL.

**Action: Head of Student Support Services,
President for Charities and Communities**

Report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers

6.11 The Committee noted the report from AUSA together with a written response thereto from the University Secretary, the latter having been tabled at the meeting.

(copies filed as SAC/170214/05 and SAC/170214/10)

6.12 The Committee noted the latest available data regarding numbers of students with dependants. It also noted that the data, and issues relating to student parents, would be considered at the next meeting of the Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity (26 March 2014), and that AUSA had been invited to prepare a paper for discussion at the meeting.

6.13 The Committee was informed that the University had made a commitment in its Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreement for 2014-2015 to '...develop our policy in respect of care-leavers, in partnership with the local authority, with the aim to improve our support arrangements and apply for a Buttle Trust Quality Mark in 2015/16.'

6.14 The Committee noted that AUSA had purchased a Cargo Bike to aid the expansion of the Veg-bag scheme to Foresterhill and Hillhead. Estates undertook to identify storage facilities for the bike upon its arrival.

Action: Estates

6.15 The Committee noted that AUSA had highlighted concerns regarding the 'steady stream' of international students who are suffering financial hardship. The Head of Student Support clarified that, although the Discretionary Fund is not available to International/EU students, there are funds available to such students who experience unexpected and/or exceptional financial hardship. In cases where students are in considerable debt i.e. beyond that which the fund could assist with, and with no indication of a change to their financial circumstances in the near future, Student Support provides advice as to the best options available to them. AUSA was advised that international students approaching AUSA for financial assistance should be re-directed to Student Support.

6.16 The Committee noted that the Travel Plan Co-ordinator is investigating the option of operating a half-hourly bus service between Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill with an extension to Hillhead at peak times. Draft proposals will be considered shortly by the Advisory Group on Sustainability & Social Responsibility, with a view to having a new service in place for the start of 2014/15. The new transport proposals would be available to both students and staff.

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, Sport and Exercise Team, Chaplaincy, Infohub, University Sport, Student Recruitment and Admissions Service and the Careers Service.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/07)

7.2 The Committee noted in particular:

- Work was progressing to develop plans for affordable accommodation for students with families on the Dunbar Hall site.
- A group of trainee teachers from China will arrive in April 2014 for a 6-month period and will be housed within University accommodation. The Director of Student Life agreed to liaise with

AUSA regarding the date of their arrival so that AUSA could plan welcome events for the students. The Convener advised that the Alumnus Association would be happy to be involved in the welcome activities.

Action: Director of Student Life, AUSA

7.3 The Committee thanked the Student Resident Assistants for their efforts and variety of activities that had been made available to students in university accommodation over the festive period.

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. The Director highlighted in particular that the National Student Survey (NSS) for 2014 had recently been launched. A variety of initiatives to encourage students to complete the survey, including a £5 print credit and an increased availability of PCs on which to complete the survey, were being rolled out. The Committee noted that the Institutional Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) would also open shortly.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/08)

9. Library, Special Collections and Museums

9.1 The Committee noted the report from the Deputy Librarian and Head of Library Services, where recent Library activities had included a Kaizen Blitz project to look at the process of the Library invoicing of overdue materials, and the wider topic of fines.

(copy filed as SAC/170214/09)

9.2 The Committee further noted that there is currently no direct link between students who are absent for medical or other mitigating circumstances, and their consequent inability to return materials on time. The Committee recognised that Library staff were very supportive in such circumstances, but also that there might be merit in looking at this linkage in greater depth. The President for Education undertook to raise this issue with Library staff.

Action: President for Education and Employability

10. Date of next meeting

10.1 The next meeting will take place on Monday 12 May 2012 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.