

Minute of the meeting held on 10 May 2010

(Confirmed)

Present: Lady Catto (Convener), Mr G Hunter, Mr S Cannon, Ms C Duncan, Mr L Forsyth, Mr J Keating, Ms L Foley, Professor WF Long, Mr S McKinnon, Mr R Parker, Ms K Ross, Mr J Simpson, Mr S Robertson with Mr L Bebbington, Mrs J Chalmers, Ms Y Gordon, Mr M Seed, Mr A Wight, Ms N McPake, Ms M McHaney, Ms C Ryan, Mr A. Leitch, Mr A Ryan, Ms J Batty and Ms K Christie (Clerk).

Apologies: Professor GJA Burgess, Ms S Beverstock, Mr J Simpson

21. Welcome

- 21.1 Dr Gillian Mackintosh, Director of Academic Affairs and the new Students' Association (SA) sabbatical officers for the 2010/2011 academic session were welcomed to the Committee, along with guest attendees, Mr Laurence Bebbington (Deputy Librarian and Head of Library Services) and Ms Yvonne Gordon (Deputy Academic Registrar (Student Services), Registry).

22. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Timetabling (minute 15.1 refers)

- 22.1 The Committee noted that further to the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board meeting of March 2010, Registry is working to streamline the current timetabling system by removing redundant bookings and introducing specialist software. It is anticipated that a first draft of the 2010-2011 timetable will be completed by the end of May 2010 and will be circulated to Schools for comment.

Examinations (minute 18.5 refers)

- 22.2 The Committee noted the response from the Deputy Academic Registrar (Student Information Systems) regarding the concerns of students with respect to evening and weekend examinations. The exam diets in the Academic Calendar vary from a 2-week exam diet in January to a 3-week exam diet. The additional week in May, provides the opportunity to schedule exams without using evenings or weekends, however in January, the number of exams and available exam venues mean the diet is more restricted. Registry actively tries to minimise the number of exams held during evenings and weekends and will continue to do so.
- 22.3 The SA President expressed concern regarding provision for disabled students during examinations, particularly during evenings and weekends, but was assured that the University would make certain that all necessary provision would be made available.

Appeals and Complaints (minute 18.10 refers)

- 22.4 The Committee noted that following concerns expressed at the last meeting of SAC, the Senior Vice-Principal had asked the Convenor of the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL) to review recent trends in Appeals, Complaints and Discipline cases. This issue had also been raised at the May meeting of Senate. The issue was now considered to be a matter for Senate, with the findings of the review to be considered by a working group of the Senate Business Committee and reported to Senate. The SAC would be kept informed of Senate actions.

Action: Secretary to the University

Student Car Parking (minute 18.17 refers)

- 22.5 The Committee noted representatives from the SA and Estates had met to discuss the implementation of controlled parking zones as part of the new Library development. It was further noted that the SA are to make a representation to Aberdeen City Council representatives in May to discuss their concerns for, in particular, students living out with Aberdeen who rely on close-to campus parking areas.

23. QML Opening Hours (minute 18.6 refers)

- 23.1 The Committee received an update from the Deputy Librarian regarding a pilot scheme to extend the opening hours of the Queen Mother Library (QML). The committee noted that the QML will now open from 8am to 2am during Sunday to Thursday, with most services continuing to be available during the extended hours. The Committee further noted that the number of students using the library at these times so far was encouraging, but Library staff will monitor student response and evaluate accordingly.
- 23.2 The Committee noted that the SA was actively promoting the scheme through social networking sites and SA newsletter.
- 23.3 The Committee also noted that the Library was actively reviewing its services with a view to enhancing provision to students and staff. The review, led by a Library Project Board and involving the use of student focus groups, will include consideration of Library policies with regard to borrowing entitlements and purchasing procedures, support for eLearning and online resources and Student Library Induction provision.

24. Evaluation of Class Representative System (minute 18.2 refers)

- 24.1 The Committee noted the findings of the working group tasked to undertake a Class Rep System benchmarking exercise. The Committee further noted that the working group concluded that (i) our current student representation system is still in the early development stage, (ii) the selecting, training, liaising with and supporting of class reps varied significantly across areas of study with respect to procedures and effectiveness thereof, and (iii) the channels of communication for class reps to and from, both the SA and University, could be improved.
- 24.2 The Committee also noted that the working group felt there was a need to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the SA and University with respect to class reps and the operation of our student representation systems.
- 24.3 The Committee approved the recommendation that a longer-term working group, chaired by the SA and comprising representatives of the SA and University, be established to consider ways in which our system of student representation be further developed and to bring recommendations to this effect to a future meeting of the Student Affairs Committee in the first instance.

Action: SA President

25. Tier 4 Immigration Update

- 25.1 The Committee received an update on the recent changes to student immigration legislation and the consequent impact these have on the University's responsibilities in this area, with regard to sponsor license, student visa applications, admissions and monitoring.

The Committee noted in particular:

- 25.2 The University of Aberdeen continues to maintain an A-rated Tier 4 Sponsor Licence which will run until February 2013, provided the University continues to meet its obligations under the sponsor responsibilities. The UKBA has introduced a further category of sponsor, namely the Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS), which has automatically been applied to all current A-rated Tier 4 sponsors; however, if the University wishes to retain this status it must apply to do so by the end of June. HTS institutions can choose whether to report students who fail to attend on 10 occasions or instead undertake (at least) two further "re-registrations" spaced evenly throughout each academic year and report withdrawals within 10 days of the re-registration process. It will be recommended to UCTL that, even if we retain HTS status, the former option should continue meantime, and we should review the situation again in a year's time.
- 25.3 Phase 4 of the Tier 4 immigration system was introduced February 2010, whereby all new international students and international students who wish to extend their current visa must have the University's Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) number before they can apply for their visa. SRAS have appointed a new Admissions Officer with specific responsibility for the operation of the UKBA Sponsor Management System and to issue CAS numbers to students. SRAS is confident at this stage that everything is in place to ensure the University can meet the requirements of Phase 4 of Tier 4, and for applicants to be issued with their CAS number in a timely manner.
- 25.4 There has been a downturn in postgraduate taught applications to date. Conversion rates will be carefully monitored over the summer period, aided by the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) which allows applications to be tracked as long as the UKBA regularly updates its computer system.

25.5 The University has seen a significant increase in refusals and returned applications for student visa extensions made in the UK due to the new objectivity being applied by the UKBA. In addition to causing distress and disruption to students, there are concerns for the reputation of the University as the number of refusals noted against the University could impact on whether the University retains its HTS status.

25.6 The Committee noted the concerns expressed, and asked that the SAC be kept updated on Tier 4 issues.

Action: Clerk

26. Student Health and Safety Risk Register

26.1 The Committee was asked to comment upon a draft version of a new Student Health and Safety Risk Register developed by representatives from the SA and Directorate of Student Affairs and the University Safety Adviser. The Register aims to address health and safety matters relating to non-academic areas of university life.

26.2 The Committee noted the large amount of good practice already being undertaken in this area, and the recommendations for further activity.

26.3 The Committee agreed that the current draft of the Register should be considered by the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL). In particular, UCTL should be asked to give consideration to the study/work/life balance of students.

Action: Clerk

26.4 The Committee noted that the current draft of the Register was due to go before the next meeting of the University's Health and Safety Committee and requested that the working group provide a progress report to the next meeting of SAC.

Action: Head of Student Support Services

27. Student Resident Assistants

27.1 The Committee noted plans to restructure and build upon the current wardenial system in halls of residence. It was noted that the proposed Student Resident's Support Staff Team will be led by the Community Liaison Officer, who will be supported by an additional full-time 'community liaison' member of staff; a team of approximately 40 Student Residents' Assistants (SRAs); portering staff; managers involved in the running of Halls; and members of Student Support services as required and as appropriate.

27.2 The Committee further noted that the move from 'wardens' to 'SRA's would be accompanied by a change in the Terms and Conditions of Employment; current Wardens have been, and will continue to be consulted at all stages of the process, and are be eligible to apply for SRA positions.

27.3 The Committee welcomed the appointment of a Residents Community Development Co-ordinator, to be line managed by the SA, noting the role would provide an opportunity for enhancing social networking within halls and further collaboration between the University and SA.

27.4 The Committee noted that the SA was, in the main, supportive of the proposed changes, but had concerns regarding how disciplinary cases within halls under the new structure might be handled. It was noted that discussions regarding this issue were still in process.

28. Strategic Plan

28.1 The Secretary to the University informed the Committee that the Principal would welcome SAC contribution in the design of the University's Strategic Plan.

28.2 The Committee noted that prompt-questions would be put to the University Community in the next few weeks, with feedback welcomed from all to inform discussion at the next meeting of Senate. A draft Strategic Plan would be considered by Court in June and the SAC would be asked to comment on this draft in due course.

29. Postgraduate Teaching Assistants

- 29.1 The Committee noted that from October 2010, the Centre for Learning & Teaching will offer a development programme which addresses the specific needs of postgraduate students and postdoctoral staff, beyond the initial tutor / demonstrator training provided by Colleges. The Programme has been designed using feedback from constituent groups of postgraduates and postdoctoral staff, and has the support of Heads of School and UCTL. Successful completion of the Programme will entitle participants to become Associate Fellows of the Higher Education Academy, providing them with a qualification in teaching in higher education that is recognised nationally. It will also provide a streamlined route into the higher level PG Certificate in HE Learning & Teaching programme at the University of Aberdeen, and into equivalent programmes at other HEIs in the UK, hence supporting the future mobility of staff from the University.

30. Students' Association

AUSA Relocation to Butchart

- 30.1 The Committee noted that all SA services, including Student Radio and Gaudie, had now relocated to the Butchart building. While further work is still to be undertaken to renovate Butchart, the SA was happy with the additional facilities and space the building offered. Feedback to date from users and visitors had been very positive.
- 30.2 The Committee suggested that the SA may wish to review the possibility of changing signage within Butchart, as a means of making the building more identifiable with the SA.
- 30.3 The Committee noted that the SA had received comments from visually impaired students regarding accessibility difficulties presented by the current lighting and cobbles outside Butchart. The Head of Student Support Services informed the group that she would be seeking to meet with Estates regarding any building works undertaken at Butchart to ensure adequate accessibility provision was made for disabled students. The Committee asked to be updated on this issue at the next meeting of SAC.

Action: Head of the Student Support Services and Assistant Director of Estates

Students' Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI)

- 30.3 The Committee noted that the SA had undergone the final audit of the SUEI in March and were awaiting the results. The Committee further noted that the results are categorised by Gold, Silver and Bronze, with approximately 80% of institutions who undertake the SUEI receiving a Bronze award (which indicates that an Association is operating an effective Sports Union and student services).
- 30.4 The Committee noted the SA had found the process to be of great benefit, and noted the thanks given by the SA President to all involved in the Initiative, in particular SA staff.

AUSA Governance and Strategy Working and Advisory Group (GASWAG)

- 30.5 The Committee noted the SA is working to prepare a new 3-5 year Strategic Plan. The SAC was invited to comment on the proposals to date, with the SA welcoming in particular suggested objectives or actions for achieving its aims.
- 30.5 The Committee noted that the SA acknowledged that greater emphasis should be placed upon postgraduate support services within the new plan.
- 30.6 The Secretary to the University suggested that, on finalising the Strategic Plan, the SA may wish to request a University internal audit of SA services.

Action: SA President

31 Sabbatical Reports

- 31.1 The Committee noted the SA had recently launched a campaign aiming to improve lighting within Seaton Park and to raise awareness of safety issues amongst the student body. The Committee also noted that Campus Services do run safety awareness campaigns, to encourage students to walk around the park, and would be happy to work with the SA on this issue.
- 31.2 The Committee suggested the SA and Estates organise a meeting with Aberdeen City Council to discuss the campaign; the Committee asked to be kept abreast of progress.

Action: SA President

- 31.3 The Committee congratulated the SA on being awarded funding from the Climate Change Fund as part of a project to reduce students' carbon footprint. The Committee noted that the SA had appointed one Project Co-ordinator and two Project interns.

32 A.O.C.B

- 32.1 The Committee noted the concerns of the Rector with regard to a lack of theatre space for student productions. It further noted the Rector had written to the Senior Governor of the University asking that the University consider devoting resource to establish a student theatre. The Rector emphasised, in particular, that there was currently a lack of suitable performing space available to students since the loss of Marischal College as a venue, and that a fully equipped theatre would be a useful marketing tool to attract new students to the university.
- 32.2 The Committee noted that a plan to build a performance space was within the University's 10-year Capital Plan, however given other projects such as the new Library and relocation of the Rowett Institute of Nutrition & Health's research facilities, it was not a current priority.
- 32.3 The Committee noted that UMG acknowledged that there was a need in the interim for performance space, particularly for University Music, and that a working group led by Professors Gane and Stollery had been set up to consider options and identify such a space. The Secretary to the University invited the Rector to join this working group.

33. Reports

To note:

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| (a) | Students' Association | <i>(copy attached as SAC/100510/30)</i> |
| (b) | Directorate of Academic Affairs | <i>(copy attached as SAC/100510/31)</i> |
| (c) | Directorate of Student Affairs | <i>(copy attached as SAC/100510/32)</i> |

34. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting is Monday 6 September 2010 at 2 p.m. in Committee Room 2.