

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Minute of the meeting held on 17th October 2011
(Confirmed)**

Present: Ms J Batty, Ms T Birley, Ms J Bjorkqvist, Mr S Cannon, Ms K Christie (Clerk), Dr B Connolly, Mr A Downie, Ms K Duncan, Mr L Forsyth, Dr L Foley, Mr G Hunter, Mr B Lockhart (Chair), Prof P McGeorge, Mr S McNally, Dr J Morrison, Mr R Murray, Mr S O'Rourke, Mr S Robertson, Mr B Snelling, Mr K Stewart with Ms J Donald (Minutes).

Apologies: Dr G Mackintosh, Mr A Wight

1. Matters arising from the minutes

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of 30 May 2011 were approved.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/01)

Enhancing Student Support (Minute 27.2 refers)

1.2 The Committee noted that the Peer Mentoring Pilot Scheme for new Level 1 students in the School of Medical Sciences had begun. It was noted that initial feedback has been positive and that the Peer Mentoring Steering Group will meet late November 2011 to review the scheme so far, with a view to adapting as necessary, and expanding the scheme more widely to include other Schools for September 2012 new entrants.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/02)

Feedback on Assessment (Minute 28 refers)

1.3 The Committee noted that the Enhancing Feedback website will be launched to staff and students mid- October 2011. The student section contains FAQs, institutional assessment policies and sources of information and support. The MyAberdeen Virtual Learning Environment will contain a feedback 'module' (a permanent feature on the MyAberdeen home page) which will contain the links to the student section of the Enhancing Feedback website.

Student Services Engagement with Foresterhill (Minute 29 refers)

1.4 The Committee noted that an area within the Social Space on the 2nd floor of the Polwarth building had been agreed as the location for the Careers Services, Student Support Services, AUSA and Infohub to deliver their respective services at Foresterhill. The committee heard that the service began operating on Monday 17 October 2011 and that a communication plan to publicise the service for students and staff was in development.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/03)

Student Car Parking (Minute 30.1 refers)

1.5 The Committee noted that following a meeting with the University and AUSA in July 2011, it had been agreed that students should benefit from the same two options as staff in relation to parking, namely annual permits and daily vouchers. The Committee further noted that the criterion for the issue of the 50 annual permits had been set by Estates, in consultation with the Student President and Head of Student Support.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/04)

AUSA Constitution (Minute 30.10 refers)

1.6 The Committee noted that in light of issues brought to the attention of AUSA by the University's Policy, Planning and Governance (PPG) department, and concerns that it would not meet the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) requirements, the proposed new AUSA Constitution had been not been deemed fit for purpose and will not go to referendum in October 2011 as intended. A meeting has been arranged between AUSA and PPG to discuss the concerns raised, with a view to revise the Constitution in the coming months.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/05)

Butchart Phase 2 (Minute 30.4 refers)

1.7 The Committee noted that the Estates department will submit AUSA's ideas to enhance the Butchart building to the Capital Expenditure Committee for consideration.

Action: Assistance Estates Director

1.8 The Committee further noted that the problem of student access to Butchart during examination diets remained, but was reassured that the University had not lost sight of this issue.

2. Review of the Academic Year Structure

2.1 The Committee noted proposed changes to the structure of the academic year, the key features of which included moving the first half-session examination diet before Christmas, bringing forward the start date of the autumn semester and retention of a 12-week teaching semester at the expense of revision weeks.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/06)

2.2 The Committee noted advantages that could be expected if the proposed changes were approved, including exams pre-Christmas encouraging students who may be struggling in the first term to seek help at an earlier date and allowing time in January for a more comprehensive Induction for second half session entrants. However, it also noted that bringing forward the start date for the autumn semester would be problematic as it would shorten an already tight timeframe in which international students need to secure their visa for studying in the UK; further, it was noted that international students studying in the UK for the first time benefited from the existing Christmas break between teaching and examinations and the revision time that allowed.

2.3 The Committee noted the complexity of this issue, but felt that key to the decision would be to ascertain if the potential benefits outweighed likely disadvantages, and to investigate thoroughly how any perceived disadvantages might be minimised. The Committee noted that the proposal would be discussed at the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL) later in the month. *[Clerks note: it was subsequently agreed that a UCTL working group of UCTL be set up in order to discuss the issues raised in regard to the Structure of the Academic Year and to bring forward proposals in the New Year.]*

3. National Student Survey (NSS) 2010/11

3.1 The Committee noted a summary of the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) in which the University of Aberdeen took part for the fifth time in 2011. The NSS results are made publicly available on www.unistats.com. It was noted that the response rate from the University of Aberdeen in 2011 was the highest ever response rate for the NSS from the Institution.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/07)

3.2 The Committee noted that Schools have been asked to develop detailed action plans to address issues arising from the NSS survey. Schools have been asked to discuss their action plans with final year students. The Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning and the Director of Academic Affairs have also set up focus groups with cross-College Honours students to discuss issues both highlighted by the NSS and also more generally.

4. Students' Association

Year of Internationalisation

4.1 The Committee noted AUSA's plans for a Year of Internationalisation, to be launched in Refreshers' Week. The Committee noted that the aim of the project is to create new initiatives to provide a richer learning and cultural experience for University of Aberdeen students and in doing so play a major role in helping the University achieve one of its primary strategic objectives – Internationalisation.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/08)

4.2 The Committee also noted some of the new initiatives planned, including a twinning project with an international institution, holding a series of multicultural events on campus such as a Chinese New

Year Lantern Festival and a Thanksgiving meal and development of the AUSA International Students' Officer role.

4.3 The Committee further noted that AUSA had investigated funding opportunities with the National Union of Students (NUS), and were also seeking support from the University. AUSA will firm up the proposals with a view to discussing them with the University Secretary.

Action: AUSA

Societies' Space

4.4 The Committee noted that AUSA Societies are struggling to find suitable venues to accommodate their activities in the Butchart and MacRobert buildings.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/09)

4.5 The Committee further noted that the most difficult societies to cater for are those whose activities involve performance and require large spaces, such as the drama-based societies. It was agreed that AUSA and Estates would undertake a detailed analysis of the situation in an attempt to resolve some of the issues.

Action: Assistant Estates Director

Contact Hours

4.6 The Committee noted that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities UK and Guild HE had published a 'Provision of Information about Higher Education' report. From September 2012, universities and colleges in England will be required to publish Key Information Sets (KISs). These KISs will contain information on student satisfaction, graduate employment destinations, learning and teaching activities, assessment methods, tuition fees and student finance, accommodation and professional accreditation.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/10)

4.7 The Committee further noted that at the current time there is no requirement for Scottish institutions to publish KIS data, however this is currently under discussion in the sector.

4.8 In light of this discussion, the Committee noted that AUSA sought a clarification as to the University of Aberdeen's definition of 'contact hours'. It was agreed the University would formulate a response, and bring this to back to a future meeting of the Committee.

Action: Clerk

Update on AUSA Welfare Services

4.9 The Committee received the outcome of the AUSA Welfare Review which took place during summer 2011. The Committee noted that the AUSA services, formally known as Joblink and the Info & Advice Centre, have merged following the Review and now sit as one AUSA Student Advice Centre.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/11)

4.10 The Committee noted that in some key areas, AUSA offers a very different service to that of the University, for example, individual student representation in relation to Academic Appeals, employability advice and assistance for part time jobs and support for students seeking private accommodation.

4.11 The Committee also noted there has been an increase in the number of projects that AUSA has entered into jointly with the University or with other partners across the city. These projects include a plan to develop AUSA's Niteline service so that it is available to all students within the city, and a partnership with The Robert Gordon University (RGU) and RGU Students' Association to consider the feasibility of a student focused letting agency/ private accommodation service.

4.12 The Committee further noted that it was important to ensure that all students, including those based at Foresterhill, have access to the same welfare provision. It was noted that the Student Services Engagement project (see 1.4 above) was an important step in helping to achieve this.

Reports from Sabbatical Officers

4.13 The Committee noted the AUSA Sabbatical Officers' reports on their recent activities, highlights of which included the beginning of office for the new Sabbatical Officers, a successful 2011 Freshers' Week and a highly successful Student Council Elections, which saw more positions contested than in previous years.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/12)

5. Directorate of Student Affairs

The Director of Student Affairs briefly presented his report on recent activities within Campus Services, Student Support and University Sport, highlighting in particular that:

- Refurbishment will soon begin on the traditional flats at Hillhead, both internally and externally, to enhance the living and social spaces.
- Demand for the counselling service continues to be very high, particularly from repeat visitors. To address increased waiting times, a new 4-session schedule for clients has been introduced to avoid re-joining the waiting list for follow-up appointments.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/13)

6. Directorate of Academic Affairs

The Committee noted the report from the Director of Academic Affairs on recent activities within Registry, the Careers Service, the Centre for Learning & Teaching and the Student Centre. In particular, the Committee noted that:

- A number of efforts were made to enhance the students' first experience of University, with the introduction of email versions of standard bank letters, a revamp of the CanDo timetabling system and a timetable booklet for all level 1 courses.
- An online Credit Point Calculator was introduced for returning students to assess their progress following their exam results.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/14)

7. Remit, Composition and Membership

The Committee noted the Remit, Composition and Membership of the Committee in 2011/2012

(copy filed as SAC/171011/15)

8. AOCB

8.1 The Committee received a paper from the Rector requesting the Committee's support for his recommendation that the University develop a theatre or performing space. The Committee noted that the possibility of such a space was on the fund-raising agenda of Court, and that the Head of School of Education would be taking this forward.

(copy filed as SAC/171011/16)

8.2 The Committee noted its support for the concept in principle, but was mindful of competing demands on University funds.

9. Dates of meetings in 2011/2012

The meetings in 2011/2012 will be held as follows in Committee Room 2, University Office:

- Monday 20 February 2012 at 2 p.m.
- Monday 28 May 2012 at 2 p.m.