**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**
**STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Minute of the meeting held on 13 May 2013**
*(confirmed)*

Present:        Mr A Amponsah, Rev M Anderson, Ms J Bjorkqvist, Mrs J Chalmers, Ms K Christie (Clerk), Ms A Deseilligny, Mr M Dunn, Dr L Foley, Mr L Forsyth, Mr R Henthorn, Mr G Hunter, Dr M Mackie, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr G Maloney, Mr M McCorkell, Prof P McGeorge, Ms C McWilliams, Dr W Naphy, Ms E Nohe, Ms J Sewell, Ms J Shireffs (Chair), Mr B Snelling, Dr R Wells, Mr A Wight with Mrs A Whyte (Minutes).

Apologies:      Mr L Bebbington, Ms S Beverstock, Mr S Cannon, Ms E Carlin, Rev E Smart.


The Committee welcomed the incoming Sabbatical Officers for academic year 2013-2014.


**1.** The minutes of the meeting of 18 February 2013 were approved subject to amending the date of the Court from February to March in item 15.3.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/01)*

**2. Matters arising from the minutes**
2.1 There were no matters arising from the last meeting of the Student Affairs Committee, other than those already on the agenda.

**3. Student Barometer**
3.1 The Committee received a summary of the findings of the Autumn 2012 International Student Barometer (ISB) and Student Barometer (SB) survey.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/02)*

3.2 The Committee noted that a total of 188 institutions had taken part in the ISB including 6 from Scotland: the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews and Glasgow Caledonian University. 20% of Aberdeen students had responded; the highest recorded proportion for Aberdeen's participation.

3.3 The Committee was pleased to note that Aberdeen was ranked first in Scotland in the following categories: language support, the physical library, sports facilities, earning money, welcome and first night (which was also ranked 9th in the UK and 25th in the world ranking). Categories where we were not ranked so highly included safety, accommodation costs and quality, living costs, transport links (and cost) and opening bank accounts. The Committee also noted that PgR students had responded less positively than other student groups in general. The Committee noted that SRAS identified there was often a mismatch between student expectations and reality and that this would be taken forward in their communications. It further noted that the planned refurbishments to university residences (as noted at the February meeting (SAC/181213/04)) should help address concerns regarding accommodation quality, but noted this impacts on accommodation cost. It was agreed that perceptions of safety appear to have been adversely affected given recent non-University related incidents on Bedford Road and in Seaton Park. Difficulties with the opening of Bank Accounts is a perennial issue, and one that affects all institutions. The Committee was reminded of the work the Infohub had undertaken with local banks in the area to ensure Bank Letters, acceptable to all local banks and branches were received by students at the earliest opportunity, but noted that students should be made more explicitly aware of the delays in processing accounts. *[Clerk's note: the Infohub and Student Support are reviewing their practices in this area]*
*Action: The Infohub, Student Support*

3.4 The Committee noted that at the point the ISB and SB survey had been conducted the 9U bus route had not been operating and agreed that this should improve travel scores going forward. AUSA informed the Committee that they had received some negative feedback regarding the scheduling of the 9U service between Hillhead and Foresthill. The Assistant Estates Director agreed to take this feedback back to the University Travel Co-ordinator
*Action: Assistant Director Estates*

**4. Policy on Drugs and Alcohol Misuse**
4.1 The Committee noted that as a condition of enrolling students funded through the US Department of Education, the University is required to demonstrate that it has policies relating to the misuse of drugs and alcohol which apply to all staff and all students of the University. As such a draft Policy on Drugs and Alcohol Misuse (Students) was considered.

4.2 The Committee noted that the draft Policy would operate in conjunction with the University Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic).  The Committee recommended that section 3.2 of the policy be amended to reflect that in the case of students supplying illegal drugs, the University **would** refer the matter to the police. Subject to this amend the Committee, for its part, approved the draft Policy.

4.3 The Committee further noted that a separate staff policy was being developed by Human Resources (as part of the Health Living agenda).

**5. Revised Policy on Medical Certification for Students (SAC/1802/13, minute 6 also refers)**
5.1 The Committee noted the proposed draft Policy on Student Absence, to replace the existing Guidance Note on Certification of Absence for Medical Reasons or Other Good Cause,
*(copy filed as SAC/130513/04)*

5.2 The Committee noted this policy change followed discussion at the October 2012 meeting of the Student Affairs Committee when concern from local GPs regarding the level of medical certification being requested by students and the consequent impact on their ability to deal with in person queries and appointments was noted.

5.3 The Committee noted its support of the recommendation that the requirement for formal medical certification at levels 1 and 2 be reduced, with greater self-certification being permitted for those at pre-Honours level.

5.3 The Committee also noted that the impact of the policy change will be monitored to keep abreast of potential consequences of the change such as an increase in the number of students taking resit examinations having self-certified absence; it was recommended that students who self-certified on a number of occasions should be encouraged to contact the Student Advice and Support Office. It was noted that the new Personal Tutor scheme would also pick up frequent self-certifiers.
*Action: Registry*

5.4 The Committee noted that a Religion and Belief Working Group UCTL working group had been established, and would be considering practice regarding absence for religious observance.  It was agreed that any outcomes from the Working Group should be forwarded to Registry.
*Action: Equality and Diversity Adviser*

5.5 The Committee approved, for its part, the Revised Policy on Medical Certification for Students.

**6. Revised Policy on Academic Appeals and Complaints (SAC/1802/13, minute 7 also refers)**
6.1 The Committee noted the proposed amends to the University's policy on Academic Appeals and Complaints and drafts of the new Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) and new Unacceptable Actions Policy; all changes were required to ensure compliance with the recently published Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) model complaint handling procedure (CHP) for higher education.  .
*(copy filed as SAC/130513/05)*

6.2 It was noted that whilst the University has had to disassociate its Appeals and Complaints procedure the spirit of the old policy, which had worked well from both student and staff perspectives had been maintained. The Committee also noted that there was little scope to change the Complaints Handling Procedure or Unacceptable Actions Policy as the content of both was specified by SPSO directives. In particular it was noted that students now had six months in which to make a complaint following an incident.

6.3 The Committee noted that work was still in progress to determine specific procedures for the University in dealing with complaints on a day to day basis. It also noted that guidance documents for students and the general public, based on the standard template provided by the SPSO, were still in development. The Committee also noted a comment that a more staff-friendly document might be helpful in due course.

6.4 The Committee approved, for its part, the revised Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals, the Complaints Handling Procedure and the Unacceptable Actions Policy.

**7. Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)**
7.1 The Committee noted that the University would undergo Enhancement-Led Institutional Review by the QAA in October and November 2013, and the composition of the visiting ELIR Panel.

7.2 The Committee received a draft of Section 3 of the Reflective Analysis (RA), being prepared as a requirement of our forthcoming Enhancement-Led Institutional Review.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/06)*

7.3 The Committee noted that the production of the RA is being overseen by an ELIR Steering Group, and that in writing the RA, institutions were encouraged to be self-reflective and, in particular, to critically evaluate progress in areas of activity within the University. It was agreed that the document reflected the continuing enhancement agenda of the institution. It also noted that the document recognised areas requiring redress, and the actions put in place to tackle these issues. The Committee noted that the document highlighted lots of areas of good practice and change that should impact positively on many of the categories in which we were not so highly ranked in the International Student Barometer (see also minute 3).

7.4 The Committee noted that the Steering Group were hoping to include additional examples of practices and activities from within individual Schools and Colleges, and well as from AUSA.

## 8. Report from Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA)

8.1 The Committee noted that AUSA had recently undertaken research regarding harassment and assault experiences of University of Aberdeen students, focusing in particular on gender, disability and ethnicity. It further noted that a report was in progress, with a view to making a series of recommendations for AUSA, the University and others as appropriate.

8.2 The Committee noted that AUSA was now a 3rd party Reporting Centre working with, and being trained directly by, Grampian Police.

8.3 The Committee strongly recommended that AUSA ensure that the finalised report reflect clearly, and unambiguously, the numbers of students responding to each survey question to ensure appropriate context.

### Report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers
8.4 The Committee noted the report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers on their recent activities, which included:
- A successful election process for the 2013-14 AUSA Executive, which included the introduction of a new sabbatical position: President for Environment and Ethics.
- Work to restructure the staffing arrangements of AUSA to allow a re-focusing of priorities and requirements going forward. This work is being undertaken following the outcome reports of a series of recent audits as previously reported to SAC.
- A very successful 124th Annual Torcher Parade, which had elicited very good feedback from participants, spectators and the local police.
- Work towards accreditation of the Investing in Volunteers (IiV) award, a national volunteers support and development benchmark. AUSA have been working with Aberdeen Council for Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) to put in place the systems and procedures to achieve this.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/07)*

### 9. Directorate of Student Affairs
9.1 The Committee noted the report from the Director of Student Affairs on recent activities within Campus Services, Student Support, the Chaplaincy, the Infohub and University Sport, noting in particular:
- A number of external events and activities are being established to ensure the continuation of service provision and community when the closure of Hillhead Central Building goes ahead in early October.
- An Employer Engagement Coordinator has been recruited into the Careers Service. It is anticipated that their role will strengthen and build upon the University's existing employer engagement provision.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/08)*

### 10. Directorate of Academic Affairs
10.1 The Committee noted the report from the Director of Academic Affairs on recent activities within Registry and the Centre for Academic Development, which highlighted in particular:
- The change of name and remit of the Centre for Learning & Teaching to the enhanced Centre for Academic Development (CAD).
- Registry's involvement in initial work to support the first phase of the OneSource Student Lifecycle Project (see also minute 13).

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/09)*

**11. Report from the Rector**
11.1 The Committee noted the report from the Rector.  In particular the Committee noted that approval had been given for a Performance Space in memory of the previous Rector, Stephen Robertson.  The Committee also noted the possibility of a Stephen Robertson scholarship fund was being considered.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/10)*


**12. Update on Personal Tutors**
12.1 The Committee noted the update in regard to the introduction of personal tutors, and in particular, the role descriptor for Personal Tutee.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/11)*


**13. Class Representative Reform**
13.1 The Committee noted that AUSA proposed to pilot, in 2013-2014, a new system of 'academic' representation, whereby elected student academic representatives, in post for one academic year rather than one semester, will represent disciplines by level of study.  It is intended the pilot will be supported by a Code of Practice for representatives, and training and support will be provided by AUSA.  *[Clerks note: UCTL approved the proposal at its May 2013 meeting].*

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/12)*


**14. OneSource – Student Lifecycle Project (Phase 1)**
14.1 The Committee noted the paper from the OneSource project team outlining a summary of the Student Lifecycle Project and specifically Phase 1 which includes the delivery of an online system, 'MyCurriculum' for all new and returning students.  It is anticipated that this phase will support student curriculum choice for academic year 2014-2015 and will include the provision of a personal timetable for students.  It was noted that this would help to address timetabling concerns noted in the International Student Barometer.

*(copy filed as SAC/130513/13)*


**15. Date of next meeting**
The Committee noted the dates of the Student Affairs Committee for 2013-2014 were still to be confirmed and would be circulated as soon as possible.