

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 26 March 1999

Present: Professor IR Macdonald (Convener), Professor PR Duff, Dr JH Farrington, Professor SD Logan, Dr WF Long, Professor PA Racey, Professor DAS Fergusson (*vice* Dr JG Roberts), Professor PJ Sloane, Professor DW Urwin, Mr D Welsh, Mr JA Forster, Mr JLA Madden and Dr T Webb (Clerk).

Apologies: Professor DG Houlihan, Dr NLM Milne, Mr C O'Sullivan, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr JG Roberts, Professor AA Rodger, Dr JG Simpson, Dr IR Torrance, Ms YS Gordon, Mr F Lovie, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr PJ Murray and Mr G Pryor.

Ms G Thomson attended for the IDEAS Project discussion (Minute 184 refers).

MINUTES

- 183 The Committee approved the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 February 1999.
(*copy filed as UCTL/260399/155*)

IDEAS (INTEGRATING DISABILITY IN EDUCATIONAL ARENAS) PROJECT

- 184.1 The Committee received an outline of the IDEAS Project.
(*copy filed as UCTL/260399/156*)
- 184.2 Ms Gayle Thomson, the IDEAS Project Officer, attended the meeting for this item and gave a brief overview of the Project. The Committee noted that the Project was part of a SHEFC Learning Support for Students with Disabilities Initiative. The University of Aberdeen was collaborating with Northern College, The Robert Gordon University and the University of Stirling in regard to the Project, and was the lead institution. The aim of the Project was to develop a systematic method of integrating disability issues into mainstream institutional practice. The promotion and implementation of change within higher education institutions in Scotland through an enhanced staff development programme would be a primary outcome of the Project, thus directly benefiting the total higher education experience of students with disabilities.
- 184.3 The Committee noted that Ms Thomson would arrange to meet with Departmental Disability Co-ordinators and other members of staff, and that the work of the Project would be communicated, *inter alia*, via the creation of a web-site.

STUDENTS' WORK AFFECTED BY THEIR UNDERTAKING PAID EMPLOYMENT
(Minute 169.4 refers)

- 185.1 The Committee received comments from the Senate in regard to the proposed Policy Statement concerning students' work affected by their undertaking paid employment.
(*copy filed as UCTL/260399/157*)
- 185.2 After discussion of the points raised by the Senate, the Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate the following revised draft Policy Statement:-

The University acknowledges the financial burden placed upon students and sympathises with those who encounter financial difficulties. It recognises that many full-time students have to undertake part-time paid employment to provide financial support for their studies. The University's guideline is that full-time students should spend no more than 15 hours per week undertaking employment during term-time. Where a potential conflict may arise in regard to fulfilling the attendance and/or performance requirements of a particular course, students should seek advice from the relevant Course Co-ordinator or Head of Department, as appropriate, at the earliest opportunity. Notwithstanding this, academic standards cannot be compromised and students' first priority must be to fulfil the academic obligations of their studies. Consequently, students must ensure that their employment commitments do not conflict with the requirements of their studies.

Action: TW

QUOTAS FOR HONOURS OPTIONS

- 186.1 The UCTL considered a memorandum from Professor Gane concerning quotas for honours courses.
(copy filed as UCTL/260399/158)
- 186.2 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity and Law) had already considered this issue and had referred the question of capping course numbers to the UCTL for consideration. The ASC's view to date had been that the capping of students registering for courses was not legitimate save in exceptional circumstances e.g. limitations imposed by physical constraints on resources such as laboratory space.
- 186.3 After a full discussion, the Committee agreed that the general policy should be that quotas for courses should not be permitted save in exceptional circumstances and that it was the responsibility of the relevant Academic Standards Committee to consider such requests on an individual course basis. In applying to an ASC for exemption to permit a quota being operated for a particular course, a Department should include the following:-
- the reasons for requesting a quota, including a pedagogical case as to why it would be inappropriate or impracticable to design a course for delivery to a relatively larger number of students;
 - the proposed method of selecting students in order to apply a quota;
 - whether there would be any flexibility in the method of selection e.g. by ensuring that any student with a career intention in a particular speciality should not be prevented from registering for a particular course if they deemed that course to be essential for their career intention.
- 186.4 The Committee considered that an ASC, in deciding whether or not to allow a quota for a particular course, should consider the Level of the course (i.e. Level 1-5) and whether the proposed maximum number to be allowed to register on a course was appropriate for that Level.

Action: TW

DOUBLE-MARKING OF HONOURS EXAMINATION SCRIPTS

- 187.1 The Committee considered a request from the Department of Psychology that the University should move away from its current policy that written examination scripts be marked independently by at least two examiners, to a system of single-marking of all work together with a moderating procedure.
(copy filed as UCTL/260399/159)
- 187.2 It was noted that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) had advised that if the University moved to moderated single-marking, it would need to be able to demonstrate that the moderating scheme was fulfilling its function and that the University was satisfied that the single-marker was marking to appropriate standards i.e. the University would need to demonstrate that its marking systems were valid and reliable. The QAA's view was that the question of standards became much more difficult without double-marking.

- 187.3 After discussion, the Committee agreed to re-affirm the University's current marking procedures whereby all honours and taught postgraduate written examination scripts be double-marked independently (i.e. without the second marker being aware of the first marker's comments and mark) and marked anonymously (i.e. that candidates be identified by number and not by name).

Action: TW

PARTICIPATION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS IN ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- 188.1 The Committee considered the CVCP Code of Practice on the External Examiner System concerning the participation of External Examiners in assessment procedures (which had been revised by the Committee on 23 October 1998), in light of concerns expressed by two Heads of Department at the increase in workload for the January 1999 examinations that had resulted from using the new procedures.

(copies filed as UCTL/260399/160, 160a and 160b)

- 188.2 The Committee agreed that the Clerk should discuss the issues with the two Heads of Department to identify whether or not their procedures might be revised in order to reduce the workload which had arisen in the recent examination diet. In this regard, the Committee agreed that there should be no requirement for a Department to photocopy written examination scripts (which was a time-consuming process) and that it was acceptable to send scripts to External Examiners by registered post, which was the practice operated by some Departments.

Action: TW

REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR STRUCTURE

- 189.1 The Committee received responses to the draft Report of the Working Party to Review the Undergraduate Modular Structure from the Undergraduate Programme Committees for Law, Engineering and Medicine, from individual members of the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Science) and the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine), and from the Faculty of Arts & Divinity.

(copies filed as UCTL/260399/161 and 161a-161d)

- 189.2 The Committee agreed that the Report be revised in light of discussion of the above responses and that, in regard to changes to Recommendation 8, these should be agreed with Professor Houlihan, Professor Logan and Dr Long. The Report would then be submitted to the Senate for consideration.

Action: TW

CAREERS & APPOINTMENTS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT : 1998/99

- 190.1 The Committee received the Annual Report for 1998/99 from the Careers & Appointments Service.
(copy filed as UCTL/260399/162)
- 190.2 The Committee also received draft First Destination figures for 1997/98, which were tabled, to be appended to the above Report.
- 190.3 The Committee noted that the Frequency Counts for the 1997/98 First Destination return to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) had been received only the previous day. It was, however, clear that there would be a major problem in reconciling these with the figures held locally, since HESA excluded from its analyses data relating to part-time students or to those undergraduates and taught postgraduates who qualified for their degrees in an academic year than that in which they were last in attendance. Additionally, the Academic Section had identified 297 1997/98 graduates eligible to be returned to HESA on whom no data had been obtainable, and who therefore appeared in HESA's figures as 'unknown'.

- 190.4 The Committee expressed its concern, in the context of the forthcoming publication of Performance Indicators for Higher Education and other league tables (whether official or otherwise), that the University's return was as comprehensive as possible within the rules HESA had laid down. To this end, it was noted that a meeting had already been held between representatives of the Careers Service and the Academic Section to consider ways in which the response rate from graduates might be improved. The Deputy Clerk of the Senate was also in contact with HESA to confirm that the software which had been specified locally to extract relevant First Destination data from the Computerised Student Record and return it to HESA conformed accurately in terms of coverage to the Agency's requirements. In the event that it did not then it was agreed that the Clerk to the Committee should draw to the attention of the University Secretary its concerns that any changes should be made as soon as possible, and the feasibility of a re-submission of data for 1997/98 investigated. Additionally, as with all HESA returns, the University would have the opportunity to ask for appropriate comments to be included on HESA's Quality Assurance database before the return for 1997/98 was signed off at institutional level.
- 190.5 In the meantime, the Committee noted that Mr Madden hoped to produce more complete First Destination figures for its next meeting. These would if necessary place the HESA figures alongside the more complete data which was held locally.
- Action: JLM/TW*
- 190.6 In his oral report, the Director of the Careers & Appointments Service drew the Committee's attention to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's intention to produce precepts, or guiding principles, by which institutions may practically be measured in regard to the incorporation of career progression into the academic process of all degrees, the integration of careers services into the work of Departments in supporting the career aspirations of students, and a mechanism for auditing such progression and integration.
- 190.7 The Committee accepted Mr Madden's offer to draft a paper outlining different models of partnership between Departments and the Careers Service for consideration at a future meeting.
- Action: JLM*
- 190.8 The Committee also noted the Director's concerns in regard to the funding of his staff attending professional external courses. And, in regard to internal training and sharing of expertise, particularly in relation to team-working, the Committee noted that the Directors of the Careers & Appointments Service and of the Centre for Learning & Professional Development would consider the potential for the sharing of resource and expertise.

Action: JLM/JAF

CONSULTATION PAPER ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS (POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATIONS)

- 191.1 The Committee received a Consultation Paper on Qualifications Frameworks : Postgraduate Qualifications, which had been circulated to all Higher Education Institutions by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, together with a draft response to the Consultation Paper which had been prepared by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate).
- (copy filed as UCTL/260399/163)*
- 191.2 The Committee approved the draft response and agreed that it be referred to the Senate for formal approval.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS : ARRIVING AT EMPLOYERS' DEFINITIONS
(Minute 172.6 refers)

- 192.1 The Committee received a paper from the Director of the Careers & Appointments Services concerning transferable skills. It was noted, in particular, that arising from a survey of around 120 major recruiters of graduates in the UK as to the attributes, qualities and skills they valued in graduates, the first three in order of importance were effective communication, team work, and the ability to solve problems, respectively; and that these were seen as the key to defining the concept of graduate transferable skills in the workplace.

(copy filed as UCTL/260399/164)

NEXT MEETING

193. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Friday 28 May 1999 in Committee Room 2.

TW/LG
1.4.99