

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 October 1999

Present: Professor IR Macdonald (Convener), Ms L Brown, Mr A Cole-Hamilton, Dr JH Farrington, Professor SD Logan, Dr WF Long, Dr NLM Milne, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr JG Roberts, Professor PJ Sloane, Professor IR Torrance and Professor DW Urwin with Mr JA Forster, Mr F Lovie, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr JLA Madden, Mrs M Park, Mr G Pryor and Dr T Webb (Clerk).

Apologies: Professor PR Duff, Professor DF Houlihan, Professor PA Racey, Professor AA Rodger and Dr JG Simpson.

MINUTES

212. The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 1999.
(copy filed as UCTL/211099/177)

REVIEW OF THE *GRADE SPECTRUM*

- 213.1 The Committee received data on Honours degrees awarded between 1995-1999 which included comparative data on degree classifications awarded before and after the introduction of the *Grade Spectrum*. It also received a summary of External Examiners' comments from their 1998/99 reports in regard to the Common Assessment Scale and/or the *Grade Spectrum*, together with detailed comments from the External Examiner for the BSc in Computing Science. Of 126 reports received, only nine External Examiners had commented specifically on the *Grade Spectrum*: six had been critical, and three had been supportive, of the *Grade Spectrum*.
(copy filed as UCTL/211099/178)

- 213.2 The Committee agreed the following:-

- (i) that no change be made to the *Grade Spectrum* but that an analysis of degree results should continue to be made each year to observe the trends in degree classification awarded;
- (ii) that in order to inform future discussion of the *Grade Spectrum*, Heads of Department be asked to provide details of the following:-
 - the number of elements of assessment which are used to determine degree classification in the programmes for which they are responsible;
 - the number of students in each of the last three years who were awarded an Honours classification in accordance with General Regulation 20 for First Degrees (i.e. in which a candidate had missed an element of Honours degree assessment for reasons of illness or other good cause);
 - the number of students in each of the last three years who were awarded a No Paper for an element of Honours degree assessment i.e. who missed an assessment for no good cause;

- the number of students in each of the last three years who were awarded a degree classification different to that which was indicated by a strict application of the *Grade Spectrum* (i.e. the number of cases where discretion was applied), with details for each classification band.

Action: Clerk

**POLICY CONCERNING FAILURE IN ELEMENTS OF HONOURS
ASSESSMENT AND THE APPLICATION OF DISCRETION IN
APPLYING THE GRADE SPECTRUM**

214.1 The Committee received a paper concerning failure in elements of honours assessment and the application of discretion in applying the *Grade Spectrum* as a consequence of three recent academic appeals.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/179)

214.2 The Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate that the following be incorporated as Notes to the University's *Honours Classification in All Degree Programmes (Grade Spectrum)* with immediate effect:-

Notes

- 1 General Regulation 20 for First Degrees shall apply where candidates have been unable to complete an element of Honours degree assessment at the prescribed time on account of illness (which must be certified by a medical practitioner) or other good cause. [Good cause is defined as any reason outwith a candidate's control e.g. compassionate or unavoidable circumstances and does not include, for example, misreading of the examination timetable in regard to the date, time or venue of an examination].
- 2 Where candidates fail to complete an element of Honours degree assessment at the prescribed time without good cause (see Note 1), they shall be awarded a No Paper (NP) for each such element: for the purposes of the grade spectrum, this shall be interpreted as candidates having been awarded a mark of 0 for these elements. Candidates in this position cannot expect to be awarded a class higher than a 2ii unless the Examiners choose to use their discretion to depart from the class indicated by the grade spectrum.
- 3 There can be no undertaking that the Examiners will choose to use discretion to depart from the class indicated by the grade spectrum. And in no circumstances other than those that are outlined in General Regulation 20 for First Degrees can the fact that a student has not completed any element of assessment, or the mark obtained in any element, be discounted for the purposes of Honours classification.
- 4 Where the Examiners choose to use their discretion to depart, in an upward direction, from the class indicated by the grade spectrum, it shall normally be as a consequence of (a) a candidate's overall performance and (b) the particular circumstances which have resulted in a candidate not satisfying the normal grade spectrum requirement for the higher class.

- 214.3 The Committee also agreed that the Clerk be asked to prepare a document, for consideration by the UPC Conveners, in regard to the guidance which Heads of Department and Advisers of Studies should give to students who either miss an element of Honours degree assessment without good cause or who fail an element of Honours degree assessment, as to the potential effect this would have on their degree classification and what steps they could take, if any, to remedy their position (Note 2 above refers).

Action: Clerk

GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS IN REGARD TO WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS

- 215.1 The Committee noted that two recent academic appeals had been based on misleading information being given to students by a Course Co-ordinator in regard to the content of a written examination. It therefore agreed that the following statement of good practice be sent to Heads of Department, for dissemination to all academic staff in their Department, in regard to the information provided to students concerning written examinations:-

- that great caution must be exercised when informing students about the content (as opposed to the structure) of a written examination and should be sufficiently broad so as not to give students an unfair advantage in completing the examination;
- that any information which staff give to students in regard to the structure and/or content of an examination should be in writing and sent to all students (preferably in the course handbook);
- that the actual examination paper must comply with the above information provided to students;
- that written examinations (and, indeed, all assessments) must relate to the learning outcomes (i.e. objectives) for a course, which should be indicated in the course handbook given to all students at the start of a course.

- 215.2 The Committee also agreed that the above information be included in the Academic Quality Handbook.

Action: Clerk

MOBILE PHONES IN EXAMINATION HALLS

- 216.1 The Committee considered two issues relating to mobile phones in examination venues which had been referred to it by a member of the Senate, who was also a Departmental Examinations Co-ordinator:-

- (i) the possibility that mobile phones could be used to assist cheating in examinations (especially those which were very small and difficult to see when they were being operated);
- (ii) the problem of mobile phones which were stored in a candidate's bag (at the front or rear of the examination venue) starting to ring during an examination.

- 216.2 The Committee agreed that students be informed that mobile phones should not be taken into examination venues and that the University's *Rules for the Conduct of Prescribed Assessments and Written Examinations for Degrees or Diplomas* be revised accordingly. Also, advice would be provided to Departments on how this rule should be brought to the attention of students.

Action: MIP

EXAMINATIONS HELD OUTWITH ABERDEEN

- 217.1 The Committee received (a) a proposal from a Departmental Examinations Officer that consideration be given to the holding, outwith Aberdeen, of those examinations which were published in the Examinations Timetable, (b) a statement of the University's current policy and (c) issues to be considered if the policy were to be changed.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/182)

- 217.2 The Committee agreed unanimously that no change be made to the current policy. Permission to hold outwith Aberdeen those examinations which were published in the University's Examinations Timetable would only be granted in exceptional circumstances (which did not include personal inconvenience or expense). It was agreed that Heads of Department be reminded to inform their staff that students who made such requests must apply in writing to the Assistant Registrar in the Examinations & Timetabling Office, who would refer requests to the Senior Vice-Principal for decision, and that the decision did not rest with Heads of Department.

Action: Clerk

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE : EXTERNAL EXAMINING

- 218.1 The Committee received a copy of the QAA's draft *The Quality Assurance Code of Practice: External Examining*, and a draft reply indicating the University's comments.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/183)

- 218.2 The Committee agreed that the draft reply be amended to highlight to the QAA the difficulties which HEIs already experienced in recruiting senior and experienced academics to serve as External Examiners and that their future recruitment must not be jeopardised by the imposition of an overly-bureaucratic Code of Practice.

Action: Clerk

PROGRAMME FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

- 219.1 The Committee considered a discussion paper from the Directors of the Centre for Learning & Professional Development and the Directorate of Information Systems & Services which it had requested in regard to the development of a strategy for the provision of communication and information technology (C&IT) skills for students.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/184)

- 219.2 It was agreed that Deans be asked to refer the paper to their Faculty's appropriate teaching and learning forum and to invite Mr Pryor and Mr Forster to present their paper at such fora, and that Mr Pryor and Mr Forster should prepare more specific proposals in due course.

Action: Deans/JAF/GP

TIMETABLING OF CORE COURSES

220. The Committee approved a reiteration of the University policy that, unless there were extenuating circumstances, the timetabling of compulsory (core) courses for any degree programme should not be changed once publicised.

Action: Clerk/MIP

REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP: 1999/2000

221. The Committee noted its remit, composition and membership for the current session.
(*copy filed as UCTL/211099/185*)

REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR STRUCTURE

(Minute 195 refers)

- 222.1 The Committee noted that the following timetable had been agreed with the Deans for taking forward Recommendations 5, 6 and 8-12 of the Review of the Undergraduate Modular Structure (Appendix I to document 177 refers):-

Recommendations 5 and 6

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 30 November | Professor Houlihan and Professor Logan to submit plan for the design of biological science programmes (Recommendation 5 refers) |
| 31 January | Dr Roberts and Professor Sloane to comment on the above plan (Recommendation 6 refers) |
| 28 February | The four Deans to submit a report for consideration by the Working Party on Undergraduate Modularisation |
| 24 March | Working Party's Report to the UCTL |
| 3 May | UCTL's recommendations to the Senate |

Recommendations 8-12

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 31 January | Each Dean to conclude Faculty discussions of Recommendations 8-12, as appropriate |
| 28 February | Joint Report from Deans to be submitted to the Clerk in regard to Recommendations 8-12, for consideration by UCTL in March |
| 3 May | UCTL's recommendations to the Senate |

- 222.2 The Committee also received a draft, tabled, document from Professor Houlihan outlining the progress which his Faculty had made in regard to the implementation of Recommendation 8 concerning the move to a 24-credit first year structure for Science and Engineering students based on six 4-credit courses as the norm.

(*copy filed as UCTL/211099/185a*)

- 222.3 The Committee noted that the proposals were very much in line with the outcome of the undergraduate modular review and agreed to record its congratulations to all those involved in the planned restructuring of Level 1 provision in Science and Engineering. The proposals had been prepared in consultation with science Departments in the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences, and Departments were already considering the implications of the proposed changes at Level 1 in regard to Level 2 provision.

- 222.4 The Committee noted that there would be implications of the changes for those Departments in other Faculties whose programmes included Level 1 courses offered by Departments in the Faculty of Science & Engineering and agreed that the proposed changes be brought to the attention of all Heads of Department. If necessary, special meetings of the relevant Academic Standards Committees and Undergraduate Programme Committees would be convened to ensure that programme changes as a consequence of Level 1 course changes could be approved within the deadlines for the printing of the University Calendar.

Action: Clerk

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE CLASS CERTIFICATE SYSTEM

(Minute 195 refers)

223. The Committee noted that, arising from the last meeting of the UCTL, Officers had been asked to bring forward a paper reviewing options for the future of the Class Certificate system: this would be submitted to the next meeting.

Action: Clerk

THE ASSURANCE OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS

(Minute 196 refers)

- 224.1 The Committee noted that Deans had submitted nominations for membership of a Working Party to consider defining explicit standards and preparing for subject review. It was hoped that the first meeting would be held in the Winter Term.

Action: Clerk

- 224.2 The Committee also noted that, following a request from a Head of Department and after consultation with the relevant Deans, the Convener had agreed that the programme of Internal Teaching Reviews scheduled for 1999/2000 should be deferred. This was partly to ensure that the Departments concerned were able to devote as much time as possible in preparing for the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise. It had been acknowledged that the University's internal teaching review procedures would be revised for next session once the details of the QAA's proposals for subject review were announced (Minute 196 refers). Deferral of this session's planned internal teaching reviews would therefore allow the Departments concerned (which would be reviewed externally in 2003-2006) to undergo an internal teaching review aligned much more closely to the requirements of external subject review than the University's current framework.

Action: Clerk

SUBJECT REVIEW

(Minute 196 refers)

- 225.1 The Committee noted that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council had agreed recently, in principle, to contract with the QAA for a new process of external review of the quality and standards of educational provision. Subjects were to be reviewed between 2000-2003 and 2003-2006, as indicated at the last meeting (UCTL document 167 refers). The QAA planned to publish full details of the new framework for the assurance of quality and standards and how it would operate before the end of October.

- 225.2 The University was required to inform the QAA, by 1 November 1999, of those subjects due for review in 2000-2003 in which the University expected to have ≥ 30 fte students and, in such cases, in which academic year the University would prefer each subject unit to be reviewed. Deans had been asked to liaise with Heads of the relevant Departments and submit a timetable for subject review between 2000-2003 by 27 October.

Action: Deans

- 225.3 It was noted that Deans and Heads of Department had been sent an extract from notes which accompanied the QAA Chief Executive's address to the CVCP Conference on 14 September 1999, for information.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/186)

CAREERS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

(Minute 199 refers)

226. The Committee noted that Deans had submitted nominations for membership of a Working Party on careers guidance. It was hoped that the first meeting would be held in the Winter Term.

Action: Clerk

MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

(Minute 200 refers)

227. The Committee noted that a statement for staff and students in regard to medical certificates had been approved by Professor Ritchie and the Convener. It had been sent to the Director of the Student Health Service for comment, who had also been asked to seek the views of the local General Practitioners' Committee. It would be brought to the attention of Departments and students, once finalised.

Action: Clerk

REVIEW OF TEACHING FUNDING METHOD

- 228.1 The Committee noted that the SHEFC was considering a move from full-time equivalent (FTE) students to credit-value enrolments (CVE), as measured in the SCOTCAT Scheme, as the unit for measuring student activity. The transition to the new method would present a number of practical problems and the Council was establishing advisory groups on implementation of the new method. Mr DM Jones, Senior Assistant Registrar, had prepared a position paper which had been circulated to the Convener and Deans for information. It was highly likely that, at some point, the University would need to migrate from its existing credit-rating system to that followed by SCOTCAT (or its successor, the proposed Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework). A report would be submitted to the Committee in due course as national debate proceeded and further details and implications became clear.

Action: Clerk

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM

229. The Committee received and noted a report from Mr J Lemon, DISS, which indicated that the problems with the Student Course Evaluation Form encountered in the first half-session of 1998/99 had been resolved almost entirely for the second half-session. The report had been circulated to Departments for information. In future, Departments would be able to submit the SNAP files for printing via E-mail; and they would be able to request an SPSS file to allow further analysis within their own Departments.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/187)

INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION (ILT)

230. The Committee noted that Heads of Department and academic staff had been circulated with the ILT's e-mail address (www.ilt.ac.uk) and directed to the progress made on the development of the criteria and processes of membership of the Institute for Learning and Teaching.

GAINING MEMBERSHIP OF THE ILT

231. The Committee noted that the Director of the Centre for Learning and Professional Development had written to all academic staff concerning (a) the provision of workshops to help experienced staff complete the fast-track route for membership of the ILT and (b) the provision of a development programme for those staff who were ineligible for the fast-track route but whom, nevertheless, wished to gain membership of the ILT.

LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY UNIT

232. The Committee received and noted a progress report on activities of the Learning and Technology Unit.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/188)

EXAMINATION PAPER DATABASE PILOT PROJECT

233. The Committee received and noted a paper in regard to a pilot project to establish an electronic examination paper database. The document had been circulated to Heads of Department, who had been asked to consider providing DISS with written examination papers electronically rather than in paper copy, to allow a comprehensive database to be maintained.

(copy filed as UCTL/211099/189)

PROGRESS FILES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

234. The Committee noted that the University had received a Joint Consultation Paper on a HE Progress File which had been prepared jointly by the policy units of the CVCP, SCOP and QAA. Responses were required by 21 December 1999. A draft response would be prepared for the next meeting.

Action: Clerk

**QUALITY ASSURANCE CODE OF PRACTICE :
COLLABORATIVE PROVISION**

235. The Committee noted that the above Code had been published recently and was available for consultation in the Senate Office (ext. 2039).

QAA BIANNUAL REPORT: AUGUST 1999

236. The Committee noted that the above report was available for consultation in the Senate Office (ext. 2039).

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

237. The Committee noted that meetings would be held on the following Fridays at 2.00 p.m.:-

10 December 1999; 4 February 2000; 24 March 2000; 26 May 2000

TW/LG
27.10.99

UCTLMEET5/minoct99