

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2000

Present: Professor I R Macdonald (Convener), Ms L Brown, Mr A Cole-Hamilton, Mr D P Lessels, Dr J H Farrington, Professor D F Houlihan, Dr N L M Milne, Dr J G Roberts, Professor A A Rodger, Professor P J Sloane, Professor I R Torrance and Professor D W Urwin with Ms G Dawson, Mr J A Forster, Mr J L A Madden, Mrs M Torrance, Dr T Webb and Ms M M Strachan (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor S D Logan, Dr W F Long, Professor P A Racey, Professor L D Ritchie and Dr J G Simpson

MINUTES

- 269 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2000.
(*copy filed as UCTL/240300/208*)

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

- 270.1 Mrs Torrance and Ms Dawson spoke to the report, 'Communications and information technology training'. It sought to review provision of training across Faculties in light of the expected cessation of the Academic Skills course after session 2000/1. It was suggested that materials be developed to allow students to work independently and in their own time, with support available for those who needed it. Exemptions could be gained by validation of relevant skills gained before students entered university.
(*copy filed as UCTL/240300/209*)
- 270.2 The Committee agreed that all students graduating from the University should have attained a certain minimum level of IT skills irrespective of the degree course taken and agreed further that it was the role of the Committee to approve such threshold levels. Mrs Torrance was invited to liaise with Mr Forster and Mr Madden to define appropriate minima for the Committee's consideration.
Action: MT, JAF, LM
- 270.3 It was noted that the chosen method for acquisition of IT skills might differ between Faculties with some choosing the separate provision suggested in the report while others might prefer to embed the training in subject-specific courses. Deans were invited to discuss within their Faculties the method(s) that would be appropriate within their disciplines.
Action: Deans

SUBJECT REVIEW

- 271.1 Dr Roberts reported that the briefing session held on 22 March 2000 had been useful and had been attended by representatives of all departments but one of those involved in subject review in the first half-cycle, 2000/3. The main focus had been on the similarities and differences between TQA and subject review, programme specification, subject benchmarking, and the self-evaluation document. Useful feedback had been given by departmental representatives on the sort of central support needed, such as improved statistical data on first destinations and retention rates, the need for models of good and bad practice in drafting programme specifications, and the desirability of using internal teaching reviews as a preparation for subject review in the session prior to the latter.
- 271.2 The Committee noted that a further briefing session would be held on 3 May when Mr Norman Sharp of the QAA's Scottish office would give a presentation and answer questions.
Action: TW, JAF

WORKING PARTY ON CAREERS GUIDANCE

- 272 Dr Farrington reported that the Working Party had made good progress and would report to the next meeting of the Committee. Recommendations would be brought forward regarding a draft institutional statement on careers guidance, an institutional plan to ensure delivery of such guidance, and systems to assure its quality. **Action: JHF, Clerk**

COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE

- 273.1 The Committee considered a report from the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering & Medicine) regarding comments from external examiners for the BSc degrees.
(copy filed as UCTL/240300/210)
- 273.2 With regard to a comment expressing an external examiner's concern about the use of the upper portion of the CAS scale, the Committee endorsed the Departmental response that the higher CAS marks should be used where justified. It was agreed that departments should be reminded that CAS mark 20 represented the best possible student answer appropriate to the level of the course. In response to another external examiner's comments regarding the combining of marks, the Committee requested that Departments be reminded that CAS marks should not be aggregated or averaged. **Action: Clerk**
- 273.3 The Committee noted that the Common Assessment Scale had been formally reviewed in 1997/8 and endorsed then as being satisfactory.

GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STUDENTS WHO EITHER FAIL, OR FAIL TO ATTEND OR COMPLETE, AN ELEMENT OF PRESCRIBED DEGREE ASSESSMENT

- 274.1 The Committee noted that the *Guidance Note* had been revised in light of discussion at the Senate on 1 March 2000. A further revision to paragraph 9 of the paper, proposed by the Department of Psychology, was tabled. The revision would mean that, if a student did not successfully complete a honours course which was a compulsory element of a given degree, he or she could not qualify for the honours degree concerned. The suggestion was designed to satisfy the requirements of the British Psychological Society.
(copy filed as UCTL/240300/211&211a)
- 274.2 The Committee noted that other departments whose degrees were subject to accreditation by external bodies would not wish to impose such a condition. It was also judged that the University's primary responsibility was the content and standard of the degrees which it awarded, with external accreditation being a secondary, albeit important, consideration. The University was solely responsible for the award of degrees and for determining the requirements for awards, although programme design could take account of profession or statutory body requirements where appropriate.
- 274.3 The Committee decided to refer the issue to the Dean of Science & Engineering for further discussion within the Faculty. The paper would be reconsidered at a later meeting of the Committee. **Action: DH, TW**

FOUNDATION DEGREES: DFEE CONSULTATION PAPER

- 275 The Committee approved the draft response to a recent DFEE Consultation Paper on Foundation Degrees in England.
(copy filed as UCTL/240300/212)
Action: TW

REPORT FROM THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- 276 The Committee approved the amendments to current practice recommended by the Sub-Committee on Students with Disabilities following the latter's consideration of the QAA draft Code of Practice for Students with Disabilities. *(copy filed as UCTL/240300/213)*
Action: Clerk

REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR STRUCTURE: VACATION COURSES

- 277 The Committee approved the following guidelines, concerning the credit rating and maximum duration of vacation courses, which had been approved by the three Academic Standards Committees and the Deans.
- (i) Flexibility should be maintained where possible.
 - (ii) Courses should be credit rated using the same basis as for taught courses, ie, 1 credit = 36-40 hours notional student effort. Departments should be asked to justify going outwith this recommendation.
 - (iii) The credits achieved from these courses should be used to count towards progression and graduation requirements. If a Department wished to exclude credits achieved from a vacation course from progression and graduation requirements, they should be required to provide justification.
 - (iv) Departments should be required to state the precise timing and duration of the course in their Catalogue entry and should be required to ensure students were informed about the course as early as possible.
 - (v) Departments should be encouraged to run such courses in term-time wherever possible. In particular, it was suggested this would be made easier if there were cross-faculty liaison.
 - (vi) Departments should be encouraged to restrict vacation courses to a maximum of 14 days. Applications outwith this recommendation should be considered on an individual basis.
- Action: Clerk*

CONVERSION OF MARKS AWARDED BY AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

- 278 The Committee noted that, after considering an external examiner's report, the Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity & Law) had decided to refer to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning the issue of converting grades awarded to students on exchange to American institutions to the University's Common Assessment Scale. Proposals would be submitted to the next meeting.
Action: Clerk

THE EFFECT ON DEGREE CLASSIFICATION OF CLASS CERTIFICATE REFUSAL IN A COURSE WHICH IS A PART OF AN HONOURS PROGRAMME AND FAILURE IN AN ELEMENT OF HONOURS ASSESSMENT

- 279 The Committee noted that the Senate (1.3.00) had agreed to recommend the following to the Court:
- “that for students admitted to an Honours programme which commences in 2000/2001 or thereafter, those who are refused a Class Certificate in a course which is part of their Honours programme, rather than being able to re-attend, will be awarded the equivalent of a No Paper (NP) for that course, i.e. a CAS mark of 0 when applied to the *Grade Spectrum* used for determining degree classification. [Such students would be in the same position as currently applies to those who fail, or who fail to attend or complete without good cause, an element of Honours assessment i.e. they could normally obtain no higher an award than a Lower Second Class Honours degree unless the Examiners applied discretion to depart from the class indicated by the *Grade Spectrum*]. In addition, it should be noted (a) that, where a Class Certificate is refused in the first year of a two-year Honours programme, it may result in a student failing to satisfy the stated pre-requisite for one or more final year Honours courses and/or being deemed unsatisfactory by the Head(s) of the Department(s) in which they are studying (General Regulation 16.1(6) refers) and, hence, being excluded from their Honours programme; and (b) that where the Calendar prescription for an Honours programme explicitly states that (in addition to

satisfactory attendance) either appearance for assessment in, or a pass in, a stated course is a compulsory requirement for award of a degree, a student refused a Class Certificate in that course can not normally qualify for award of the Honours degree concerned];”

The Senate also agreed to recommend to the Court changes to General Regulations 1 and 3, as recommended by the UCTL, as a consequence of the above decision.

**LEARNING TECHNOLOGY UNIT:
REPORT TO UCTL: MARCH 2000**

- 280 The Committee noted the LTU report for the period October 1999-March 2000.
(copy filed as UCTL/240300/214)

CODE OF PRACTICE: EXTERNAL EXAMINING

- 281.1 The Committee noted that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education had recently published its Code of Practice for External Examining. Hard copies had been sent to Deans and to Conveners of the Academic Standards Committees for information.
- 281.2 The Committee noted that the extent to which the University’s current policies and practices were consistent with the Code’s precepts and guidance was being analysed and a report would be submitted to the Committee in due course. *Action: TW*

RELIEF TEACHING
(see minute 258)

- 282 The Committee noted that a paper would be prepared for the next meeting. *Action: Clerk*