

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2001

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Professor HW Chandler, Dr JH Farrington, Professor DF Houlihan, Dr WF Long, Mr R McGregor, Professor PA Racey, Professor LD Ritchie, Mr M Torrance and Professor DW Urwin with Dr A Chadwick, Professor E Matthews, Dr T Webb and Ms MM Strachan (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Professor PR Duff, Dr S Kunin, Professor SD Logan, Professor JG Simpson, Professor PJ Sloane, Mr JLA Madden and Mr G Pryor

MINUTES

357. The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2001.

(copy filed as UCTL/230301/266)

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE: SECTION 3: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

(see Minute 347.3)

358. Professor Matthews, Convener of the Sub-Committee on Disabilities, reported that the paper outlining the current University position with regard to the QAA Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities had been delayed as a consequence of staff illness.

PROGRESS FILES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

359. Dr Roberts reported that the 12 March workshop on progress files for higher education had been most helpful. Personal development planning was an important means of encouraging students to reflect on their learning and plan for their future education and employment. Higher education institutions would be expected to provide appropriate support and the Working Group established by the Committee on 2 February would be examining that and related issues.

WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT RETENTION

360. It was reported that work was progressing on the analysis of past and current failure rates to try to identify the factors which lead to student failure. It was recognised that academic support mechanisms needed to be enhanced. In the short term, information on departmental failure rates should be made available to Deans so that they could decide what action was needed at departmental level. The Conveners of the two undergraduate Academic Standards Committees were invited to consider whether the ASCs might have a future role in monitoring failure rates. It was noted that the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Science) was to examine the issue with regard to their area of study and then refer the matter to the Dean of Science & Engineering.

Action: WL, DU

WORKING GROUP ON ADVISING AND STUDENTS'

PROGRESS REVIEW

361. Dr Roberts reported that the Working Group had considered views received from Advisers of Studies and from the student body, and that the position in other ancient Scottish universities was being sought. A sub-group had examined the Adviser of Studies job description and had decided that only slight changes were required. Differences in advising practice between Arts and Science could best be reflected in the detailed guidance offered to Advisers in each area. Dr Roberts recommended that the Working Party's final report should suggest options to be considered by the UCTL and the Senate. The key issues were whether to retain the current position that advising was a specialist task or require all members of teaching staff to be Advisers, and whether or not it would be better to have a specific link between an entrant's degree intention and the Adviser's own discipline.

WORKING GROUP ON CAREERS GUIDANCE

362.1 Dr Farrington reminded the Committee that the Working Group had been in abeyance since May 2000 pending publication of the QAA Code of Practice on Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG) in January 2001.

362.2 The Working Group had received a good response to a departmental questionnaire. The results indicated that, while there was considerable commitment at departmental level to the development of transferable skills, there was variation across disciplines regarding the assessment of such skills. There was a similar variation in the extent to which departments themselves provided careers-related guidance and in the sort of relationship departments developed with the Careers and Appointments Service. While there was evidence of much good practice, there was still a great deal of work to do.

362.3 The Working Group had drafted an institutional policy on CEIG and was developing an institutional plan which would address the three areas of: departmental protocols regarding CEIG, involving a specific service agreement with the Careers Service; staff development

needs; and Careers Service activities. The Group recognised that the two last carried resource implications. The Group would submit its report to the UCTL on 25 May.

Action: JHF, Clerk

WORKING GROUP ON C&IT SKILLS: REVISED REPORT

363.1 Professor Urwin reported that the Working Group had reconsidered its report in the light of discussion at the 2 February UCTL meeting. It was recognised that, in practice, the basic and further IT skills listed in the policy document approved by the Senate on 14 June 2000 were either embedded in courses already or would be taught via the new Information Skills course. The recommendations had been partially revised to allow a greater degree of discretion to departments regarding the need to embed in courses the four additional ('advanced') skills listed in the Senate document. In addition, revised Recommendation 4 allowed for the future provision of a full range of web-based self-taught modules, while the new Recommendation 6 (formerly a point to note) had been included to make appropriate provision for problems that might be encountered by disabled students. In addition, in point 11, the Group noted the need to consider how self-taught modules could best be assessed and assessment results recorded.

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363.2 Some departments would not be able to embed in their courses all four 'advanced' IT skills listed in the Senate policy document. Having noted Glasgow's requirement that all students require basic IT competence as a condition of progress towards graduation and the provision made for teaching and assessment, the Committee decided that the policy document should be referred back to the Senate with a recommendation that it be revised. The favoured option was to retain as mandatory the basic and further skills, either to be embedded in courses or to be acquired via the Information Skills Course, and for the 'advanced' skills to be made available via self-taught modules where they could not be included in a given discipline. Professor Urwin and Dr Webb were invited to draft a document to be brought to the Committee on 23 May, having first sought advice from DISS.

Action: DU, TW, Clerk

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS AND EXTERNAL EXAMINING

364.1 The Committee considered issues raised by the Senate in its consideration on 28 February of amendments to the Academic Quality Handbook concerning assessment and examinations and external examining.

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364.2 The Committee approved the recommendation that a footnote be added to those paragraphs which referred to "at least one External Examiner being required to attend final Examiners' Meetings" to indicate an alternative position for programmes where there might be only a very small number of candidates.

364.3 The Committee approved the recommendation that more direction should be given to departments with regard to providing feedback to students on their performance in all written examinations other than final examinations, with the proviso that feedback on final written examinations should be made available to those students who intended to resit a final examination e.g. in order to satisfy accreditation requirements. The arrangements by which feedback should be given would, however, be for departments to determine.

364.4 The Committee approved the recommendation that departments should be reminded that oral examinations for postgraduate taught students should be held by the end of week 50 of the programme.

364.5 The Committee agreed that the proposed text of relevant paragraphs of the Academic Quality Handbook should be revised to make clear (a) the difference between, on the one hand, discretionary oral *examinations* held to confirm or rectify the marks or result provisionally awarded to a candidate and, on the other, discretionary *interviews* held to monitor the quality of academic provision and the overall standard of academic performance, (b) whether students had the right to request an oral examination or interview and (c) whether External Examiners could meet with students in the absence of internal examiners. It was agreed that Dr Webb would circulate to members revised wording as agreed with Dr Roberts.

Action: TW

QAA: THE FRAMEWORK FOR QUALIFICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

365.1 The Committee considered the need for all higher education institutions to amend procedures so that degree programmes starting in academic year 2003/2004 and thereafter would lead, on successful completion, to qualifications awarded in accordance with the framework for qualifications of HEIs in Scotland.

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365.2 The Committee approved the recommendation that the University amend the credit rating of all courses in accordance with the definition of the credit point used in the SCOTCAT framework where one credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by the average learner at the relevant level in 10 hours of learner effort (where credit is a measure of outcome, not of study time). It was noted that, while the conversion was based on multiplying Aberdeen credit ratings by a factor of 5, there would be a very great deal of consequential work in amending the student record, the Catalogue of Courses, the Calendar, departmental handbooks and the University's and departments' websites.

365.3 The Committee noted that much work remained to be done with reference to credit requirements at Levels 3 and 4, the related issue of compensation for failure at those levels, and credit requirements for non-Honours degrees. It was agreed that a Working Group should be established comprising Dr Roberts (Convener) and the Conveners of the Undergraduate Programme Committees. Professor Racey, Convener of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), would receive all papers circulated for the Working Group and would be invited to attend if required. The remit of the Working Group would be reported to the UCTL.

Action: Clerk

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS REFERRED BY THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE (SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & MEDICINE)

366.1 The Committee noted the External Examiners' comments referred by the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine).

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366.2 The comments, which related to the Common Assessment Scale and the *Grade Spectrum*, raised issues that had been considered when both were last reviewed in 1998. The Committee decided that no further action was required at this stage. However, the comments would be retained to inform the next review of the Common Assessment Scale and the *Grade Spectrum*.

PROGRAMMES IN THE SAME DISCIPLINE LEADING TO THE AWARD OF EITHER AN MA OR A BSc DEGREE

367.1 The Committee considered the case of programmes in the same subject that could lead either to an MA or a BSc degree. In one subject the learning outcomes for the Honours programme were identical for the two degrees, the programme itself was identical in years 3 and 4, and the subject's core courses at Levels 1 and 2 were also identical. The only differences between the MA and BSc degrees were the flexibility in the choice of non-compulsory courses at Levels 1 and 2, and different entry requirements (going rates). The relevant subjects were Computing Science, Geography, Mathematics, Statistics and Psychology. Professor Urwin and Dr Long, Conveners of the two undergraduate Academic Standards Committees, were invited to bring recommendations to the UCTL following consideration of the issue by the Science & Engineering Faculty Teaching Committee.

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Action: DH, DU, WL

367.2 In the immediate term, the Committee approved the recommendation that, in such cases, it would be acceptable for Subject Providers to include both the MA and BSc programmes on a single Programme Specification if they so wished, with broadly the same learning outcomes for the programme but with reference to the different experience at Levels 1 and 2.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

368. The Committee considered whether Clause 2 of the arrangements for medical certification for students by a medical practitioner should be amended in the light of comments received from a medical practice in Aberdeen. The Committee noted that the medical practice in question had instituted a modest charge to students for providing certification as required by the University policy. After discussion, the Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate that the requirements for certification from a medical practitioner to cover both non-submission through illness of a piece of in-course assessment and non-attendance through illness of a specified teaching session, should be changed to allow for self-certification. However, the requirement for certification from a medical practitioner for non-attendance through illness at an end-of-course examination would remain.

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Action: Clerk

ADVISORY BOARD ON TEACHING ACCOMMODATION

369. The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Advisory Board.

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PROPOSED FRANCHISE AGREEMENT REFERRED BY THE ACADEMIC

STANDARDS COMMITTEE (ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES, DIVINITY & LAW)

370. The Committee noted that St Paul's Educational Trust, India, had proposed that the Trust enter into a franchise agreement with the University of Aberdeen to offer, in the first instance, the Designated Degree of MA in Management Studies, with further degree programmes to be offered in later years. The ASC (A&SS,D&L) had appointed a Franchise Panel to examine the proposal in detail and to report to the ASC. The Panel comprised Professor D Urwin, Professor P Duff, a member of the Department of Management Studies and an external Management Studies specialist (both to be nominated by the Head of the Department of Management Studies), and Dr T Webb.

Action: DU

WORKING GROUP ON ACADEMIC APPEALS AND

STUDENT COMPLAINTS ON ACADEMIC MATTERS

371. The Committee noted that the Working Group had met on Friday 16 March 2001. It was intended that recommendations would be brought to the UCTL in May.

Action: Clerk

NORTH AMERICAN EXCHANGE SCHEME

372. The Committee noted that the views of departments had been collated. Those views, together with draft proposals, would be considered by the Conveners of the UCTL and of the two undergraduate ASCs. A paper would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Action: Clerk

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEWS

373. The Committee noted the following:

- i. that, in the past, a Department's draft submission for external teaching quality assessment or subject review had been sent to the Heads of various central services (including DISS, Human Resources, Student Support Services) for comment prior to submission to SHEFC/QAA;
 - (ii) that, following the recent alignment of the University's Internal Teaching Review (ITR) procedures with those for QAA Subject Review, it had been agreed that a Subject Provider's Self-Evaluation Document (incorporating Programme Specifications and Curriculum Maps) should be sent to the Heads of central services at the same time as it was sent to the ITR Panel. The formers' comments on the documentation would be considered by the ITR Panel, which would provide feedback to the subject provider as part of the ITR reporting procedures;
 - (iii) that the above arrangements should ensure that Departments received relevant feedback on their Self-Evaluation Document from both the ITR Panel and the Heads of central services well in advance of the date for submission of documentation to the QAA.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

374. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Friday 25 May 2001 at 2.00 pm.

