UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2001

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Professor HW Chandler, Professor PR Duff, Dr JH Farrington, Professor DF Houlihan, Dr S Kunin, Dr WF Long, Professor PJ Sloane, Mr M Torrance and Professor DW Urwin, with Ms K Atkinson, Mr C Buchanan, Dr A Chadwick, Mr P Fantom, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr JLA Madden, Professor E Matthews, Mr G Pryor, Mrs M Torrance, Dr T Webb and Ms MM Strachan (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Professor SD Logan, Professor PA Racey, Professor LD Ritchie and Professor JG Simpson

MINUTES

375. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2001.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/274)

WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT RETENTION: INTERIM REPORT

1. Professor Sloane reminded the Committee that the Working Group on Student Retention had been established to consider:

o what measures could be taken to reduce the number of students who finally left the University without obtaining the award (or equivalent) for which they had been admitted;
o what information should be provided routinely in regard to student retention;
o whether the national performance indicators tables were influenced by the way in which student withdrawals were recorded and, if so, what changes could be made to the data provided to the Higher Education Statistics Agency that would have a positive effect on the University's positioning;
o the issue of class certificates;
o recommendations to the UCTL regarding the above and related issues.

376.2 The Group's interim report brought a number of recommendations to the Committee and Professor Sloane tabled an additional paper giving additional information regarding a proposed academic study included in the recommendations.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/275&275a)

376.3 After detailed discussion, the Committee agreed that:

(a) Recommendation (i) (Monitoring of failure rates) should be approved for implementation by the Registry, the Conveners of the two undergraduate Academic Standards Committee and the Deans;

Action: TW

(b) Recommendation (v) (Study to identify types of student at risk) should be approved by the Committee for its part and forwarded to the University Management Group;

Action: Clerk

(c) Recommendation (vi) (Using the student record to plot progression) should be approved for implementation by the Registry, subject to the identification of appropriate resource;

Action: TW

(d) Recommendation (viii) (Advisers) should be approved;

(e) Recommendation (xi) (Continuation of the Working Group) should be approved;

(f) the following recommendations:

- o Recommendation (ii) (Review of progress regulations);
- o Recommendation (iii) (Class certificates);
- o Recommendation (iv) (Progress Committees); and
- o Recommendation (vii) (Introduction of a formal category of 'students suspended from study')

should be referred for further consideration to a Working Group comprising Dr Roberts (Convener) and the Conveners of the Undergraduate Programme Committees with further recommendations to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Action: Clerk

WORKING GROUP ON ADVISING AND STUDENTS'

PROGRESS REVIEW: ORAL REPORT

377.   Dr Roberts reported that, while the Working Group had yet to finish its task, it had identified the following key points:

- o that the normal maximum advising load should be 40 students;
- o that advising should be taken into account by Heads of Department when allocating departmental duties;
- o that Heads of Department could require members of academic staff to be Advisers of Study;
- o that all academic staff should have the expectation that, at some point in their career, they would serve one, two or more terms as an Adviser.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

378.1 At its meeting on 2 May 2001, the Senate considered the UCTL's recommendations that the requirements for certification from a medical practitioner to cover both non-submission through illness of a piece of in-course assessment by the required deadline and non-attendance through illness at a specified teaching session should be changed to allow for self-certification. The requirement for certification from a medical practitioner for non-attendance through illness at an end-of-course examination would remain. Following a wide-ranging discussion, the Senate agreed that the UCTL should give further consideration to the issue in light of the views expressed at the Senate.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/276)

378.2 The Committee decided that the issue should be considered further by the Working Group established to consider, *inter alia*, class certificates (see minute 376.3 above). Recommendations would be brought to a future meeting.

Action: Clerk

DRAFT WIDER ACCESS STRATEGY STATEMENT

379.1 The Committee considered the draft Wider Access Strategy Statement which set out the University's aims and specific targets for widening participation and promoting social inclusion.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/277)

379.2 The Committee agreed that it was very important to encourage closer working relations between KEY Learning Opportunities, the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, Deans and academic departments. In particular, Deans should be invited to identify members of academic staff who might become involved in implementing the strategy.

379.3 The Committee suggested that paragraphs 5.11-5.16 (Retention and student support) might be amended in light of the discussion of the interim report from the Working Group on Student Retention (see minute 376) and the oral report from the Working Group on Advising and Students' Progress Review (see minute 377). The Committee recommended that paragraph 5.19 be redrafted to make more explicit that, while the Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law were able to offer more flexible entry to non-honours degrees, the Faculty of Science & Engineering had not as yet been able to identify ways in which that could be implemented. Professor Matthews suggested that paragraph 5.20 might be revised to make clear that specific disabilities were taken into account in making arrangements for teaching as well as for assessment. There might also be merit in addressing the recommendations of the Skills Report, the Teachability programme, the QAA Code of Practice, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Action: KA

C&IT SKILLS

380.1 The Committee considered a paper prepared by Professor Urwin, Convener of the Working Group on C&IT Skills, Mrs Torrance and Dr Webb, together with further comments from Mrs Torrance and Mr Pryor.

(copies filed as UCTL/250501/278a,b&c)

380.2 Professor Urwin reminded the Committee that the Working Group on C&IT Skills had been asked to revisit the C&IT Skills policy approved by the Senate on 14 June 2000. Following the Working Group's two earlier submissions to the Committee, a further paper was now brought for consideration. It proposed that, where possible, C&IT training and assessment should be embedded in academic courses and programmes. However, freestanding web-based training and assessment would also be available for those instances where a particular discipline could not reasonably provide training in a particular application. The web-based provision would include secure systems for validation and recording of students' assessment results.

380.3 In a wide-ranging discussion, the Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate amendments to the currently-approved Senate policy document. Basic and further IT skills would be redefined as 'essential' skills, which could and would be delivered via teaching on all the University's degree programmes. 'Additional' skills would be embedded in all degree programmes in the Faculty of Science & Engineering and in most programmes in the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences. All students would be able to acquire the additional skills via the University's web-based provision. It was noted that the proposed revision applied to undergraduate, but not as yet to postgraduate, students. If amendments to the policy were approved by the Senate, the Committee would then ask Undergraduate Programme Committees to satisfy themselves that the degree programmes for which they were responsible were indeed delivering and assessing the appropriate IT skills. The guidance notes on completing new course and programme proposal forms would be revised accordingly.

Action: Clerk

STRATEGY FOR THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

381. The Committee noted: the SHEFC circular letter HE11/2001 of 9 April 2001, Strategy for the Quality Enhancement of Learning and Teaching: Consultation Responses and Way Forward; University of Aberdeen Strategic Plan 2000-2004: Strategic Aim 2: Teaching and Learning; and a draft of Strategic Aim 2: Learning and Teaching from the Strategic Plan 2001-2005. Dr Roberts invited members of the Committee to send any comments and queries to him.

(copies filed as UCTL/250501/279-81)

WORKING PARTY ON CAREERS GUIDANCE: FINAL REPORT

382.1 Dr Farrington reported that the Working Party on Careers Guidance, established by the Committee to bring forward recommendations in light of the QAA Code of Practice on Career Education, Information and Guidance, had started its work by surveying current practice across the University. Survey results showed that there was much good practice in many departments but that coverage should be enhanced and formalised. Similarly, the present good work undertaken by the Careers & Appointments Service needed to be further developed. To that end, the Working Party had submitted to the Committee a report, a grid showing compliance with the QAA Code, a draft institutional policy on the provision of career education, information and guidance, and a draft plan for provision.

(copies filed as UCTL/250501/282-5)

382.2 The Committee approved the draft institutional policy, subject to minor textual amendments.

382.3 The Committee approved the draft plan, subject to amendments consequent upon discussion of the report.

382.4 The Committee invited Dr Farrington to revise the report and, where appropriate, the draft plan and the compliance grid, in the light of a wide-ranging discussion, the main points of record of which were as detailed below. Following revision, the report should be submitted to the University Management Group for consideration.

Action: JHF, Clerk

(i) Recommendation B1 would be added to the Committee's remit and the Committee would undertake the four-yearly review outlined in recommendation B3. The Committee would invite the Court to include a local or regional employer in its nominees to the Committee.

Action: Clerk

(ii) Recommendations B2, B4, B5 and B6 would be the responsibility of the Careers & Appointments Service. In the case of Recommendation B2, targets would be proposed by the Careers & Appointments Service for approval by the Committee.

Action: LM, PF

(iii) Recommendation C should be referred to the Sub-Committee on Disabilities rather than to the University Management Group.

Action: Clerk, EM

(iv) With regard to Recommendation D, Dr Farrington was invited to suggest, in consultation with Dr Webb, how the present forms for new and amended courses and programmes, and/or the accompanying guidance notes might be amended to ensure that appropriate provision was included.

Action: JHF, TW

(v) Dr Webb was invited to consider recommendation E to determine whether or not it would be helpful to include review of career provision within the internal teaching review process.

Action: TW

(vi) The Committee approved Recommendations F-I.

Action: Clerk

(vii) It was noted that Recommendation J was already being addressed by the Working Group on Advising and Students' Progress Review.

(viii) The Committee recommended that Recommendation K be referred to the University Secretary via the Academic Registrar rather than being submitted to the University Management Group.

Action: TW

LEARNING TECHNOLOGY UNIT BUSINESS PLAN 2001/2005

383.1 The Committee considered the draft Learning Technology Unit Business Plan for the period 2001/2005.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/286)

383.2 The Committee approved the recommendation that the Committee act as the mechanism whereby the LTU's targets and deliverables were agreed with the academic community.

383.3 The Committee agreed to recommend to the LTU Steering Group that its Chair should be a member of academic staff, with a view to the chair becoming an *ex officio* member of the Committee, subject to approval by the Senate of a revised composition (and remit) for the Committee.

Action: Clerk

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE: SECTION 7: PROGRAMME APPROVAL,

MONITORING AND REVIEW

384. The Committee received the above Code of Practice and a summary of the extent to which the University's current policies and practices were in accord with the Code's precepts and guidance. The Committee noted that, following publication of the Code last year, the new programme proposal form and accompanying guidance notes had been revised in August 2000 to take account of aspects of the Code. Programme review procedures and procedures for the design, approval, validation and review of programmes and courses had also been implemented at the same time.

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE: SECTION 1: POSTGRADUATE

RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

385. The Committee received the above Code of Practice and a summary of the extent to which the University's current policies and practices were in accord with the Code's precepts and guidance. An interim version of the document had been considered by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) in 1999, with the latest position having been considered by that Committee on 11 May 2001. The UCTL concurred with the ASC(PG)'s response.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/288)

NORTH AMERICAN EXCHANGE SCHEME

386.1 The Committee considered the recommendations regarding the North American exchange scheme brought forward by the Conveners of the two undergraduate Academic Standards Committees and a tabled paper detailing the approved scale for converting North American grades to the University Common Assessment Scale.

(copies filed as UCTL/250501/289&289a)

386.2 The Committee noted that, while the recommendations were broadly acceptable, certain aspects of the paper might helpfully be further refined. There was agreement that Heads of Department were responsible for ensuring that a student's proposed curriculum at the exchange institution was appropriate before the exchange was permitted. However, it was recognised that relevant information had to be available to assist Heads of Department. The Registry was invited to look further at what information might be made available. In discussion, it was suggested that, rather than seeking to convert on the basis of North American letter grades, it might be more useful to consider converting on the basis of the now more commonly used grade point average. Recommendations would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee after consultation with Dr Kunin.

Action: SK, Clerk

386.3 The Committee agreed that the arrangements finally put in place for the North American exchange scheme should also apply to all other non-European Union exchange schemes operated by the University.

QAA SUBJECT REVIEW

387.1 The Committee noted that Professor John Simpson had been appointed as a subject reviewer with the QAA's Institutional Review Directorate.

387.2 The Committee also noted that SHEFC was to consider the implications for Scottish higher education institutions of the recent developments in England concerning the arrangements for subject review. Universities Scotland had written to SHEFC to make clear

that the current arrangements operating in Scotland imposed too heavy a requirement and that it would be unfortunate were Scottish institutions to be disadvantaged by a heavier burden than that which applied in the rest of the UK. In addition, it would be desirable to have broadly uniform arrangements for academic quality assurance throughout the UK, although Universities Scotland considered it would be inappropriate to commit to Scotland following the English model before it was clear what the details were to be.

LEARNING TECHNOLOGY UNIT PROGRESS REPORT

388.   The Committee noted the LTU Progress Report.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/290)

ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL EXAMINING

389. The Committee noted that, at its meeting on 2 May, the Senate had approved the paper regarding assessment and external examining submitted by the UCTL, subject to minor revisions as agreed with the Convener.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE (POSTGRADUATE)

390. At its meeting on 8 December 2000, the Committee had invited the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) to clarify with the Faculty of Arts & Divinity the facilities available to postgraduate students. The Committee noted that the ASC (PG) had now reported that the Faculty offered study facilities to all postgraduate students. However, the ASC (PG) had also noted that only 58.3% of returning research students in Divinity felt that they had adequate office space and had decided to bring the matter to the Faculty's attention.

WORKING GROUP ON APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

391. The Committee noted that, while considerable progress had been made in drafting guidance notes on academic appeals, academic and non-academic complaints, and termination of study/candidature for an award, the Working Group on Appeals and Complaints would meet shortly to consider the issue of student status pending the hearing of an appeal. Recommendations would be brought to the Committee at its meeting in October.

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PROGRAMME FOR HIGHER

EDUCATION TEACHERS (AUPHET)

392.   The Committee noted a paper about AUPHET which set out the programme's aims and objectives, the target audience and the programme structure. The latter provided for core and extension components, to be delivered over a two-year period.

(copy filed as UCTL/250501/291)

MMS/LG 1.6.01