UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

# UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 7 February 2003

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Dr A Clarke, Mr D Cockburn, Professor JH Farrington, Miss A Harper, Dr WF Long, Ms C Macaslan, Mrs D Mackenzie-Skene, Professor M Player, Mrs L Stephen, Professor IR Torrance and Professor DW Urwin with Professor S Bruce, Dr D Comber, Professor MA Cotter, Ms J Duncan, Mr JLA Madden, Dr W Naphy, Mr G Pryor, Dr N Spedding, Dr T Webb and Dr G Mackintosh (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Professor PA Racey, Professor AA Rodger and Mrs K Fowler

Mr Cockburn declared interests as a member of the QAA Scotland Board, the Enhancement-led Institutional Review Steering Group and SHEFC Teaching and Learning Committee.

## MINUTES

548. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2002.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/399)*

## ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

549.1 The Committee received a briefing paper setting out the main points of the draft Handbook for Enhancement-led Institutional Review : Scotland which had been published by the QAA for consultation. A summary of the main points of discussion at the meeting of QUEST on 30 January 2003 in regard to this issue was also provided for information.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/400)*

549.2 The Convener informed the Committee that the draft Handbook had not raised anything unexpected and that initial reaction had suggested that the proposed scheme for Enhancement-led Institutional Review is not overtly controversial. Discussions at the Universities Scotland Teaching and Learning Committee and forthcoming discussions at the Universities Scotland Teaching Quality Forum would give an indication of any areas of concern within the sector.

549.3 In discussion, the following points were made:-

- o  The reference points to be used should also include internal factors such as External Examiner Reports. The list in the briefing paper concentrated on external factors such as LTSN and Subject Benchmarks.

- o  ELIR will vary to fit the Institution.

- In regard to the Promotion and Support of Effective Learning, concern was raised in regard to the implication that students would be <u>full</u> partners in the implementation, monitoring and enhancement of the learning process. In discussion, it was noted that this was not a direct quote from the Handbook and that the word "full" could be deleted.

- The document was simply an interpretation of the main points in the Handbook.

  549.4 The University's response would be signed off by the Convener in time for submission by the deadline of 28 February 2003.

*Action: NS*


### REPORT FROM THE MEETING OF QUEST – 30 JANUARY 2003

550.1 The Committee received a report from the meeting of QUEST held on 30 January 2003.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/401)*

550.2 The Convener drew members' attention to item 3 which highlighted the decision to arrange an externally facilitated workshop on aspects of Quality Enhancement. He queried whether this should be solely for members of QUEST or whether the workshop should be open to a wider audience. Following discussion, it was agreed that the workshop should be for members of QUEST who would then be able to disseminate the information to a wider audience.


### DEGREE EXAMINATIONS ON SATURDAYS AND EVENINGS

551.1 The Committee received a copy of a letter from Dr Kinnear, Head of Psychology, setting out a proposal that the UCTL should review its policy on degree examinations on Saturdays and evenings and a paper setting out a response from the Registry.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/402)*

551.2 The Convener highlighted to members that the decision to hold exams on Saturdays and evenings had been made for logistical reasons and that unless Senate were to revise its policy that students should not be timetabled for more than two exams in one day, the only way by which Dr Kinnear's proposal could be accommodated would be by extending the examination period which could only be achieved by lengthening the academic year, abolishing the revision period or by reducing the teaching period.

551.3 In discussion, the following points were made:-

- If the number of courses available were decreased, this would ease the problem and make the timetabling of exams easier. It was, however, noted that, to date, all attempts to reduce the number of options available had failed.

- Students should be made aware that exams might be scheduled on Saturday mornings or in evenings.

- Increasing to allow 3 exams per day would not accord with the University's drive to improve retention and progression.

- Would it be possible to look at abolishing Saturday exams? Students who have an exam on the first Saturday of the examination period have their revision week cut short. It was agreed that the feasibility of this could be looked into and that, wherever possible, attempts would be made to decrease the number of Saturday and evening exams.

*Action: HD*

551.4 Following discussion, it was agreed that the Senate Policy in regard to examinations should be reaffirmed and that a response should be sent to Dr Kinnear.

*Action: Clerk*

551.5 It was further proposed that there may be merit in reviewing the issue of invigilation as scheduling of exams on Saturdays and evenings can cause problems for Schools/Departments in finding staff able to invigilate at these times. While the provision of invigilators is a matter for the Head of School/Department, it was agreed that in the large venues, there may be the possibility of some co-operation in regard to invigilation between Schools/Departments. It was therefore agreed that the Registry would look into providing information to Heads of School/Department about the other exams taking place alongside their exams should they wish to use this to explore the possibility of co-operation in regard to invigilation.

*Action: HD*

551.6 It was further noted that it is getting increasingly difficult to accommodate the special requirements (e.g. individual rooms) for students with disabilities. The Convener informed members that DISS had made a computer classroom available to one Department in order that those students requiring a computer for their exams could be accommodated together. However, the Department concerned had not taken up this offer. In view of the concern expressed about the issue of special exam arrangements for students with disabilities, the Convener agreed to take the matter away and discuss it with Dr Foley, Disability Officer.

*Action: JGR*

### USE OF C & IT - SYSTEMS CONTINUITY DURING CLOSED PERIODS

552.1 The Committee received, for consideration, a paper from the Director of DISS setting out a summary of problems which had occurred following a break in computer systems which had occurred over Christmas and a proposal for ways in which this could be prevented in the future.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/403)*

552.2 The Director of DISS informed members that the paper had also been considered by the Information Management Committee (IMC). There was in increasing draw on IT resources. Options available to address the problem included using an outside service such as that used by RGU or introduction of a monitoring service linked to an on-call system for DISS staff.

552.3 It was further noted that Costed Academic Plans had shown a move to greater reliance on technology-enabled learning. Furthermore, SRAS/Marketing had highlighted a need for a 7 x 24-hour service. Following discussion, it was noted that there was no alternative but to support the proposals as set out in the paper.

**ADVISING LOADS FOR 2003/04**

553.1 The Committee received a paper from the Deans of the Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law setting out a proposal for how to address the issue of recruitment and retention of Advisers for the MA.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/404)*

553.2 The Convener reminded members that responsibility for operation of the advising system rests with the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committee, whilst the responsibility for appointment and remuneration of Advisers rests with Faculties. He informed members that the paper was included largely for information and as an update on progress made in regard to ensuring appropriate provision of Advisers for 2003/04 by 21 April 2003.

553.3 It was noted that the paper was the outcome of discussions between the Deans of the Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law and the Director of Studies (Advising) for Arts & Social Sciences and represented a number of compromises. The underlying principle of the proposals involved considering advising as an integrated administrative task to be allocated by the Head of School.

553.4 It was noted that complications may arising with the proposals, as at non-Honours level, staff often advise students following programmes from outwith their School/Department. It was noted that Schools/Departments would be asked to provide Advisers based on an fte basis and that as far as was possible departmental allocation of Advisers would be used.

553.5 It was noted that this proposal had been developed for the MA. It was agreed that the proposals would impact on the Faculties of Science & Engineering and Medicine & Medical Sciences and that these Faculties together with the Director of Studies (Advising) for Science should be consulted. Professor Torrance agreed to arrange a meeting.

*Action: IT*

**DEGREE EXAMINATION STATISTICS – ISSUE REFERRED BY SENATE**

554.1 At the Senate on 29 January 2003, a number of points had been raised in regard to the procedure for monitoring degree examination statistics agreed by the UCTL on 13 December 2002. The Committee received a paper setting out the points raised at Senate which it had been agreed should be referred back to the UCTL for consideration.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/405)*

554.2 In discussion of these issues, the following points were raised:-

- o The concerns raised by the Senator had indicated that the main reason for concern about failure rates was the University's concern about progression. It was, however, agreed that progression was not the only reason for reviewing failure rates. Failure rates of greater than 20% may indicate problems with the teaching quality.

- o The Course Co-ordinator in reviewing a course should take account of failure rates. It would therefore be good practice for such information to be available.

- o In MBChB first year, greater than 40% of students had failed. In interviews, the majority of students had indicated that their reason for failure had been that they had not done enough work. At resit, the pass rate was 98%.

o High pass rates may equally be a reason for concern.

o Reports currently being received from Deans in regard to failure rates rarely give little more comment than statistics and remedial action is rarely proposed. If the process is to be continued, it requires to be more formalised.

o If the majority do pass, it tends to indicate that there is not a problem with a course.

554.3 Following discussion, there was majority agreement that the proposals as agreed on 13 December 2002 should be adopted. These procedures could be further revised in future if required.

*Action: Clerk*


**CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE IN**

**HIGHER EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND: SHEFC CONSULTATION PAPER**

555.1 The Committee received a copy of the consultation paper from SHEFC in regard to Careers Education, Information and Guidance in Higher Education in Scotland.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/406)*

555.2 The Head of the Careers and Appointments Service drew attention to a number of points in the document:-

o The list of those being consulted does not include a single employer organisation. This is a major concern as the paper addresses skills and employability.

o The paper addresses, in the main, newer vocationally-based universities and ignores issues such as the fact that approximately 30% of students go on to pursue further training or research.

o The document is fairly nationalistic and does not address UK-wide or international issues.

o The document does not address issues relating to extra-curricular activities or work experience. Employers consider these as valuable in the recruitment process.

555.3 Following discussion, it was agreed that members should forward comments to Mr Madden (j.l.a.madden@abdn.ac.uk) by 20 February 2003 and that Professor Farrington would assist in the drafting of the response which would be signed off by the Convener in time for submission to SHEFC by the deadline of 7 March 2003.

*Action: LM/JF*

555.4 It was further agreed that the following should be approached for assistance with drafting of the response in regard to the following issues:-

Issue 1 - President of the Students' Association

Issue 3 - Director of Student Affairs

Issue 4 - Director of Wider Access Policy

**GUIDELINES FOR GOOD RESEARCH PRACTICE**

556.1 The Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), at its meeting on 6 December 2002, gave consideration to whether the *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students* and the *Postgraduate Structured Management Frameworks* should be revised in the light of the University *Guidelines on Good Research Practice* that had been approved by the Senate on 20 November 2002.

556.2 The Committee approved the recommended amendments to the *Code of Practice for Research Students* and the *Postgraduate Structured Management Frameworks* which had been proposed by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate). (Amendments to the documents were highlighted in **bold** Arial font.)

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/407)*

**CIRCULATION OF COMMITTEE PAPERS**

557.1 It had been proposed by a Head of School that it would be good practice if Heads of School could be given the opportunity to comment on proposals in regard to revisions to policies and procedures being considered by the UCTL in advance of the discussion of these proposals by the Committee.

557.2 The Committee approved the proposal that the agenda and copies of any proposals in regard to revisions to policies and procedures being considered by the UCTL should be circulated by e-mail to Heads of School in the Faculties of Arts & Divinity, Social Sciences & Law and Science & Engineering and to Heads of Department in the Faculties of Education and Medicine & Medical Sciences one week in advance of the date of the meeting and that Heads of School/Department be invited to feed any comments they would wish to make to their Dean in order that these points can be brought to the attention of the Committee at the meeting.

**MONITORING STUDENTS' PROGRESS**

558. The Committee noted that a meeting had been held on 20 December 2002 with Deans, UPC Conveners and Directors of Studies (Advising) to discuss issues relating to advising loads and the new system for monitoring students' progress. Following this meeting, a subsequent meeting had been held with Advisers of Studies on 14 January 2003 to discuss a number of proposed revisions to the system for monitoring students' progress. These revisions were proposed to address a number of concerns that had been raised by Heads of School and Advisers in regard to the operation of the system. Comments made at this meeting then informed a meeting of Heads of School held on 16 January 2003. Following these meetings, the Committee noted that the Convener of the UCTL had taken action on behalf of the Committee to approve a number of revisions to the system in order that they could be put in place for the start of the second half-session 2002/03.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/408)*

## REVISION TO GENERAL REGULATION 4

559. The Committee noted that the Convener, on behalf of the Committee, had approved a revision to General Regulation 4 as detailed below, which had been approved by the Senate, for its part, on 29 January 2003. This revision had been made to address the anomaly in the definition of part-time and full-time status in regard to the status of 45 credit points per half-session as the General Regulations currently define part-time study to be less than 40 credit points per half-session and full-time study to be at least 50 credit points per half-session.

4. All candidates from the outset of their degree programme shall be registered as undertaking either full-time or part-time study, and shall normally be permitted to complete their degree programme by that mode of study, unless the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committee has agreed that a particular Honours programme may be undertaken by full-time study only. Any change in the terms of such registration may only be made with the permission of the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committee. ~~Every candidate registered for full-time study must attend courses leading to the award of at least 50 credit points in any half-session or, in the case of candidates in Honours programmes, 100 credit points in any session. No candidate registered for part-time study shall be permitted to attend courses leading to the award of more than 40 credit points in any half-session~~ **Candidates registered for part-time study may not register for more than 80 credit points in any academic year, nor more than 45 credit points in either half-session.** In the case of an Honours programme any period of part-time study must normally be continuous and not exceed twice the period of study permitted for completion of that Honours programme (or that part of it being undertaken by part-time study).

## REVALIDATION OF DEGREES – update on progress (Minute 566 refers)

560.1 The Committee noted that the Faculties were currently addressing the outstanding submissions in regard to the revalidation of degrees.

560.2 A report on progress made by the Faculty of Social Sciences & Law was received which stated that:-

*Accountancy and Finance* – *new programme proposals are awaited; programme specifications and curriculum maps have been received.*

New Programme Proposals for each degree are being prepared and will be submitted by early March.

*Anthropology* – *all documentation required.*

The documentation has been completed and is being processed.

*Management Studies (UG and PG)* – *all documentation is awaited.*

It has been agreed that the required documentation will be submitted by 30 June 2003.

*Law* – *documentation for LLM in Criminal Justice and LLM in Criminal Justice and Human Rights.*

The ASC(PG) Committee agreed that Law should not revalidate these two programmes because they were first validated in October 2000 with all the appropriate documentation.

560.3 It was agreed that formal reports on progress made would be brought to the March meeting in regard to the other outstanding reports.

*Action: Deans*

## EXAMINATION RESULTS VIA PORTALS (minute 546 refers)

561.1 The Committee was reminded that, with effect from January 2003, students would be required to access their examination results via Student Portals and would no longer be sent a hard-copy results letter. Students wishing to receive a hard-copy of their results could, however, request this from Registry Services and certain categories of student (e.g. external candidates and Postgraduate Research students who did not have access to Portals) would continue to be sent letters in hard-copy. In regard to the deadline for submission of appeals against examination results, students were currently given 14 days from the date of their results letter to submit an appeal. However, as students could access their results on Portals the day after they were entered into the student record, it was more difficult to determine the date which should be used to set the deadline for submission of appeals. Following discussion, the Convener had agreed that students should be given 14 days from the date of the day immediately following the Senate agreed deadline for return of examination results or the date of the day after the result had been entered in the student record, whichever was the later.

561.2 It was noted that the use of Portals for release of examination results may mean that students will receive their results in public computer classrooms rather than being able to receive their results in private. It was, however, noted that students wishing to receive their results in hard copy could log a self-addressed envelope with Registry Services.

## ACADEMIC LEARNING SUPPORT UNIT

562. The Committee noted the paper outlining the activities and objectives of the Academic Learning Support Unit.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/409)*

## WORKING GROUP ON ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT COMPLAINTS

## ON ACADEMIC MATTERS (minute 564 refers)

563. The Committee noted that the final draft Guidance Notes from the University Solicitors were currently awaited. A meeting of the Working Group on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints on Academic Matters would be convened in February to discuss these, with a report being brought to the March meeting of the UCTL.

**CLASS CERTIFICATES & ATTENDANCE (minute 551 refers)**

564. The Committee noted that the Head of the School of Social Science would be bringing forward proposals for consideration at the March meeting of the Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Science, Education, Divinity and Law).

**WORKING GROUP ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND LEVELS DESCRIPTORS**

565. The Committee noted that the Working Group on Qualifications Framework and Levels Descriptors would be reviewing the University's Procedures for Determining Degree Classification (*Grade Spectrum*). As a number of critical comments had been made by some External Examiners in regard to the *Grade Spectrum*, a questionnaire had been circulated to all undergraduate External Examiners to seek information on practices in their subject at their own institution, comparisons of this to the Aberdeen system and their comments on experience of the operation of the *Grade Spectrum.* Their responses would be used to inform the discussion at the Working Group. A copy of the questionnaire was included for information.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/410)*

**SHEFC LETTER (HE/02/03) ON DEVELOPMENT OF THRESHOLD**

**STANDARDS FOR RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES**

566. The Committee noted that the University had been asked to submit comments in regard to the SHEFC letter (HE/02/03) on Development of Threshold Standards. In preparing the University's response, the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) and the Research and Commercialisation Committee had been invited to comment on the paper. In addition, a review of the extent to which the University meets the proposed minimum core standards in regard to research training, environment, supervisory arrangements, admissions criteria and appeals would be undertaken in order that any gaps could be addressed by the time these proposals were put into effect.

**DfES WHITE PAPER: THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

567. The Committee noted the Executive Summary and Chapter 4: Teaching and Learning – delivering excellence of the White Paper entitled 'The Future of Higher Education' published by the Department for Education and Skills. This paper was currently being analysed by Universities Scotland to ascertain its implications for Scotland. In particular, the Committee noted the paragraphs on Professional Standards and Staff Development (4.14), Rewarding Teachers for Good Teaching (4.17 – 4.19), Spreading Best Practice in Teaching (4.24 – 4.25), Rewards for Excellence (4.26 – 4.27) and Centres of Teaching Excellence (4.28 – 4.30).

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/411)*

**SCQF NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

568.1 The Committee noted the National Plan for Implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) that had been published by the Joint Advisory Committee for the SCQF.

568.2 It was noted that the Undergraduate Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education offered by the University conform to the SCQF. However, it was noted that the Degree of BSc and the Degree of MA (Combined Studies) require a greater degree of breadth than is prescribed for the Scottish Bachelors Degree by the SCQF.

568.3 A proposal was therefore made that consideration should be given to reviewing the base-line degrees offered by the University to bring these in line with the SCQF. It was felt that students achieving the requirements for the Scottish Bachelors Degree as prescribed by the SCQF should not be prevented from graduating with a Degree due to the more stringent requirements imposed by the University. It was agreed that this proposal should be referred to the Qualifications Framework and Levels Descriptors Working Group for consideration.

*Action: Clerk*

## HIGHER QUALITY – BULLETIN OF THE QAA

569. The Committee noted the November 2002 edition of 'Higher Quality' the bulletin of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

*(copy filed as UCTL/070203/413)*

## DATES OF NEXT MEETING IN 2002/2003

570. The Committee noted the dates of meetings for the remainder of session 2002/03 (all at 2pm in Committee Room 2), as under:-

28 March 2003

30 May 2003

### [Note by Clerk: The Committee is asked to note that, following the meeting, the date of the May meeting was revised to 23 May 2003].