UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2005

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Professor M Baker, Professor MA Cotter, Dr P Davidson, Miss A Harper, Dr WF Long, Mr C Mair, Mr D Marr, Dr D McCausland, Dr I McFarland, Mrs D McKenzie Skene, Professor T Salmon, Mrs L Stephen, Dr G Walkden, Dr M Young with Dr D Comber, Mr JLA Madden, Ms D McDowall, Dr N Spedding, Dr T Webb, Ms M Wylie, Dr G Mackintosh (Clerk) and Dr R Bernard in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Dr D Hay, Ms C Macaslan, Professor DW Urwin, Mrs J McAndrews

MINUTES

40.   The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2004 were approved.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/14)

MATTERS ARISING

41.1   Minute 18.3: the Committee noted that Human Resources had confirmed that they would be willing to issue appropriate information to relevant senior managers on request, regarding staff attendance on courses run by the Educational and Staff Development Unit. The Committee agreed that this information should be forwarded to Heads of School. The Committee further noted that there would be an item on the agenda of the next meeting of the Staffing and Development Committee regarding future development of the University's Staff Induction Programme.

Action: Clerk

41.2   Minute 32: The Convener informed the Committee that the University had received guidance from SHEFC regarding requirements for the provision of public information to be included on the University's website. Whilst the University is currently reviewing these requirements, the Convener noted that there did not appear to be anything contained in the guidance on Programme Specifications which is out of line with the University's current proposals.

41.3   Minute 37: The Committee noted that a full report on the operation of the Student Monitoring system during the first half-session of 2004/2005 would be brought to the March meeting of the UCTL. The Convener noted that it seemed likely that the report would recommend a further extension to the current arrangements to allow full consultation with the College Teaching and Learning Committees, and to enable consideration to be given to the matter by the Review of Teaching and Learning Strategy. The proposed timetable would enable any necessary regulatory changes to be made.

REPORT FROM EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

42.1   Dr Spedding updated the Committee on the main issues discussed at the meeting of the Educational Development Sub-Committee which met on 31 January 2005.

42.2 The Committee noted that three main issues arising from the last five Internal Teaching Reviews had been identified by the Sub-Committee.

- The Sub-Committee had observed that the provision of support for non-lecturing staff who teach is variable across the institution. The Sub-Committee had proposed that more formal guidance, in the form of a Code of Practice, be provided on this topic and agreed that a paper should be forwarded to the Staffing and Development Committee.
- The Sub-Committee had discussed the issues surrounding any formal undertaking to require staff to participate in development events. The Sub-Committee had agreed to forward several issues on this topic to the Staffing and Development Committee.
- The Sub-Committee had discussed issues surrounding the implementation of Personal Development Planning (PDP). It had been acknowledged that there might be training implications for Advisers of Studies associated with any implementation of PDP at undergraduate level.

42.3 In discussing the issues arising from the Educational Development Sub-Committee, the Committee agreed to invite Director of Human Resources to attend the next meeting of the UCTL in order that they might be updated on the outcome of the various issues of relevance to be considered at the next meeting of the Staffing and Development Committee (see also minute 41.1)

Action: Clerk

REVIEW OF GROUP WORK

43.1 The Committee received a report summarising the results of a survey of the assessment of group work within the University which had been undertaken in response to an academic appeal which was heard by the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee during 2003/2004.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/15)

43.2 The Committee endorsed the request from the Heads of School for the formulation of a guidance note on the assessment of group work. The Committee agreed that a small group be established to consider the issue.

Action: Clerk

ENHANCEMENT THEMES FOR 2005-06 AND BEYOND

44.1 The Committee considered a paper outlining proposals for a revised approach to quality enhancement themes over the next 5 years. This paper had originally been considered at a meeting of the Leaning and Teaching Committee of Universities Scotland

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/16)

44.2 The Committee welcomed the proposed change to a five year rolling programme of enhancement themes to replace the current year on year arrangement.

44.3 The Convener informed the Committee that the University would be working with the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews and Heriot Watt to bring forward consideration of the Research-led Teaching theme as there had been agreement that this theme should not be left until the end of the current five-year programme.

UPDATE ON ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FIRST ELIR
PANEL VISIT ON 16/17 MARCH 2005

45.1   The Committee noted the proposed timetable for the first ELIR panel visit to be held on 16/17 March 2005.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/17)

45.2   The Committee further noted that the Reflective Analysis, which would include, as one of the appendices, the updated Academic Quality Handbook, was due to be submitted to the QAA on 7 February 2005.

WAIVER OF CREDIT REQUIREMENTS (minute 21.3 refers)

46   The Committee noted a minor amendment in the proposed wording of the final sentence of the guidelines: "…it is recognised that students whose application for waiver of credit is refused may bring a claim against the University for financial compensation." The Committee approved the guidelines to be used by the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning) when considering requests to waive credit requirements on account of "Adviser error".

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/18)

REVIEW OF EXTERNAL EXAMINING (minute 28.4 refers)

47.1   The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Working Group on External Examining for taught programmes.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/19)

47.2   The Committee noted that Professor Robert Frost, Head of the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy had agreed to convene the Working Group.

47.3   The Committee further noted that the reporting schedule of the Group would be amended to include the meeting of Heads of School on 13 May 2005.

REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY'S TEACHING &
LEARNING STRATEGY - UPDATE

48.1   The task of the TLS Review Group was "to conduct a thorough review and holistic revision of the University's approach to undergraduate teaching, learning and assessment", taking account of our strategic objectives, the chief two of which are: a) to be a research-led University ranked in the UK top 20, and b) to enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the student learning experience. Working from this remit, the Review Group's initial discussions had sought to clarify the rationale for review of our teaching and learning strategy, and the vision that would lead the strategy itself. Key features identified by the Review Group included:

- we must enable all students to maximise their academic potential;

- we must ensure that the strategy is attractive and accessible to both staff and students, helping them to achieve successful teaching and learning;

- the strategy must reinforce connections between research and teaching in a way that strengthens the University's academic reputation and ensures that we offer distinct, top quality learning opportunities to our students;

- the strategy must guide best allocation of resources within the University.

Taking these characteristics into account, the Review Group had developed a model of the learning environment at the University that identified the key objects, actors and relationships that the strategy's action points would target. This model embraced, and sought to build on, three key projects already in progress: development of the Model of the Learner at the University of Aberdeen; personal development planning for students; and the review of our staff development priorities in the light of our teaching and learning strategy development needs. Background work was also underway to articulate a concept of research-led teaching at the University of Aberdeen, to involve students in the process of strategy review, to explore the implications for recruitment and admissions, and to identify best practice from other institutions' strategies that we could use to inform our own thinking. The Review Group would make initial recommendations in its interim report to Senate in March 2005. The final strategy document was to be prepared for June 2005.

48.2 In noting the update from the group reviewing the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy, the Committee agreed that the reporting schedule should be amended in order that the Interim Report could be considered at the meeting of the UCTL in March 2005, before being forwarded to Senate in May 2005.

Action: Dr Spedding

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002

49. The Committee noted the Guidance Note from the Scottish Higher Education Practitioners Group on the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, together with a summary of its implications for staff.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/20)

STAFF DEVELOPMENT COURSE AND SEMINAR
PROGRAMME JANUARY-JUNE 2005

50. The Committee noted that the Staff Development Course and Seminar Programme for the second half-session was available at:
http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffdev/

SPARQS MAPPING EXERCISE

51. The Committee noted the report on student involvement with the University which would form an annex to the SPRAQS Mapping Exercise on student engagement.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/21)

EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR OF OPERATION
OF ELIR AND THE QAA RESPONSE

52. The Committee noted the draft report from the Independent Observer on the first year of operation of the new system of Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), together with a response from the QAA.

(copy filed as UCTL/040205/22)

EXTERNAL EXAMINING WORKSHOP

53. The Committee noted that the Higher Education Academy was holding a meeting in Edinburgh on 5 April 2005 in regard to the outcome of their project team on enhancing support for External Examiners. A full copy of the HEA's report is available at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/externalexaminers.htm

LEVELS DESCRIPTORS WORKSHOP (minute 33.1 refers)

54.   The Committee noted that discussions were ongoing with the QAA regarding setting up a workshop on Levels Descriptors; this session was likely to be scheduled some time after April 2005.

**EXIT ROUTES FOR STUDENTS ENTERING WITH
ADVANCED STANDING (minute 23 refers)**

55.   The Committee noted that the Convener would be arranging a meeting of the relevant individuals in the near future to consider the issues of students entering with advanced standing, together with those surrounding the award of recognitions and exemptions.

Action: Clerk

HONOURS DEGREE CLASSIFICATION (minute 34 refers)

56.   The Committee noted that the University had received a copy of the report of the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group. The report considered the current degree classification system used in higher education, the use of credit and work on the possible measurement of value added. Further information in this area would be brought to the attention of the Committee in due course.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

57.   The next meeting would be held on Friday 25 March at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2.