UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 21 October 2005

Present: Ms CA Macaslan (Convener), Professor GJA Burgess, Professor MA Cotter, Dr P Edwards, Ms F Keefe, Mr D Marr, Dr D McCausland, Professor E Metzger, Professor T Salmon, Dr P Schlicke, Mrs L Stephen, Professor G Walkden, Professor FB Watson and Dr M Young, with Dr D Comber, Mr JLA Madden, Mrs J McAndrews, Mr R Miller, Dr A Reid, Dr N Spedding, Dr G Mackintosh (Clerk) and Dr R Bernard in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Miss A Harper, Dr WF Long and Dr T Webb

The Convener welcomed the members of the Committee to the first meeting of the new session (2005/06) and in particular welcomed those new members attending for the first time.

MINUTES

1.   The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2005 were approved.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/001)

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW – FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

2.1   The Committee received the Final Report and Action Plan of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review, together with a paper highlighting the areas of commendation identified by the QAA Review Team.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/002)

2.2   The Committee approved a draft Action Plan setting out proposals for the way in which the recommendations made by the Team should be taken forward.

2.3   The Committee were concerned that, with many of the deadlines in the draft Action Plan being set around February 2006, these may not be achievable. It was explained that these deadlines had been imposed in order that the University would be in a position to produce the required one year follow-up report to the QAA. It was further noted that many of the strands contained in the Action Plan were already underway.

2.4   In discussions regarding programme review the Committee noted that there were concerns related to requiring Schools to undertake more formal processes. The Committee agreed that most Schools already undertook reviews of this sort on an informal basis and that perhaps what is needed in this area is to make these current processes more explicit. It was further noted that the QAA's Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review is currently under review.

LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY – UPDATE

3.1   The Committee received an update on the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/003)

3.2 The Committee noted the update on the feedback received following consideration of the draft action plan by Schools and Colleges during the summer. In particular the Committee noted that Colleges and Schools had been concerned that the Learning and Teaching Strategy would restrict the autonomy of Schools and Colleges. The Committee welcomed reassurances that this was not the intended outcome of introducing the strategy: the strategy is intended as a framework within which Schools and Colleges are encouraged to shape their own work. The Committee further noted that the strategy is not seeking to radically alter the reporting and committee structure for learning and teaching within the University, rather modifications would be made to the existing structures to facilitate the introduction of the strategy.

3.3 The Committee raised some concerns regarding the proposed introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) for undergraduate students. In particular, it was stressed that if PDP is to be used successfully it will need to become deeply embedded in the undergraduate curriculum and staff will need support and training in its use. The Committee noted that there were concerns amongst the postgraduate population where PDP is currently being introduced: students are unclear why they were being required to complete the exercise in addition to undertaking their research. The Committee agreed that these issues should be taken into account by the Working Group on PDP.

Action: GW

3.4 The Committee noted that the Scottish Vice-Principals for Learning and Teaching will be meeting to begin shaping a schedule for consideration of the Research-Led Teaching QE theme, ahead of the national theme which is currently stalled. The group aims to produce some common definitions of what is meant by the term 'research-led' together with undertakings relating to how the Scottish institutions take this theme forward within their QE agendas.

Action: Convener

3.5 The Convener informed the Committee that work was currently underway to finalise plans for the new learning and teaching centre. Unfortunately, these plans had to remain confidential until affected staff had been informed of the proposals for change.

**REVIEW OF STUDENT MONITORING (SECOND HALF-SESSION 2004/05)
AND PROPOSED OUTLINE FOR REVIEW OF THE TRIAL ABOLITION OF
CLASS CERTIFICATE REFUSAL**

4.1 The Committee received the review of student monitoring for the second half-session of 2004/05 and the proposed outline for review of the trial abolition of Class Certificate refusal.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/004)

4.2 The Committee approved the timetable proposed for the review and evaluation of the trial system for Student Monitoring and concurrent trial abolition of the sanction of class certificate refusal. The Committee will consider a summary and evaluation of the trials and possible options for the future, at their meeting in December 2005. Proposals for future systems will then be considered by Colleges and Schools, before proposals are finalised by the UCTL in February 2006. The final proposals will be included for consideration by Senate in March 2006.

4.3 It was noted that further 'contextual' data relating to class sizes would be a useful addition to the final report.

Action: Clerk

**MEASURING AND RECORDING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT UK HONOURS
DEGREE: PROVISION OF INFORMATION – UUK CONSULTATION PAPER**

5.1   The Committee received a UUK Consultation Paper on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement UK Honours Degree: Provision of Information.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/005)

5.2   The Committee were concerned with the tight timescale for comments to be collated and sent back to UUK. It was, therefore, agreed that rather than seeking the views of Heads of School via the College structure, their views should be sought by circulation with a full debate of the issue at Senate on 16 November. The Committee were reassured that this would not the only opportunity the University would have to comment on any proposals: there would be another full consultation undertaken in February 2006 in follow up to this initial paper.

5.3   In general the Committee were in agreement that there are issues with the current honours degree classification system. The Committee further agreed that it might be more appropriate to revise the current well-established and widely understood system that to replace the system with a new version. The Committee were not generally supportive of the system of Distinction/Pass/Fail system proposed by the Burgess Group. In particular the Committee noted the concerns of student representatives who were of the opinion that this three-fold system would not be motivating for students; there would be no incentive to work to receive a 'Pass' degree. The Committee were particularly opposed to the concept of awarding 'Distinction' to the top 5% of students within a cohort.

5.4   The Committee proposed that it might be helpful to employers to include information on generic and transferable skills on the transcript. At present, while many of these skills are included in a student's degree programme they are not always explicitly represented on the transcript. There was, however, concern amongst the Committee that employers might be resistant to moves which would require them to spend significant periods of time considering detailed transcripts in order to ascertain the suitability of potential employees.

5.5   It was noted that when the Second Class Honours category was subdivided into its current classes of Upper and Lower, this was in response to concerns about 'bunching' of results. The Committee agreed that one possibility in response to current concerns regarding clustering of results might be to further subdivide the two classes, into either three or four Second Classes.

**WORKING GROUP ON THE COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE
AND LEVELS DESCRIPTORS: PROPOSED REMIT AND COMPOSITION**

6.1   The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Working Group on the Common Assessment Scale (CAS) and Levels Descriptors. The Committee agreed that the proposed reporting schedule may need to be revised, in particular the schedule may be influenced by the outcome of the current external consultation on UK degree classification

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/006)

6.2   It was noted that the Working Group has been established in response to concerns that CAS is not used consistently within the University and it is, therefore, necessary to consider whether CAS is still 'fit for purpose'. The Committee agreed that, in the event that the Working Group proposes consideration be given to implementing a radical replacement for CAS, any work in this area should not be undertaken until the findings of the consultation on degree classification are known. In this situation the Group would be required to agree an interim position for CAS, pending further changes.

Action: MC

SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

7.1 The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 includes provisions to extend the remit of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to include further and higher educational establishments. This replaces the Universities Scotland Scheme for the Independent Consideration of Student Complaints in Scotland: an optional scheme for independent review of student complaints and appeals to which all Scottish HEIs were given the opportunity to opt in to.

7.2 With effect from 3 October 2005, the SPSO has taken on responsibility for investigation of complaints from students, staff and members of the public where they have exhausted the internal processes available to them.

7.3 In view of this change, revisions are required to a number of existing Guidance Notes which currently give details of the process for seeking independent review where the University's procedures for appeal or complaint have been exhausted.

7.4 The Committee approved that the wording in regard to the route for independent review in relevant Guidance Notes and in Section 14 of the Code of Practice on Student Discipline be revised to read as follows:

> *"~~The University of Aberdeen has agreed to opt into the Universities Scotland Scheme for the Independent Consideration of Student Complaints in Scotland. This Scheme provides for students, who have exhausted a University's appeal and complaints procedures, to refer their appeal or complaint to an Independent Reviewer for Scottish Higher Education Institutions. Once the Independent Reviewer (or his/her nominee) has made a judgement, it would be for the University Court to decide whether or not to accept the judgement and on any remedial action to be taken.~~ <u>In accordance with the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has responsibility for investigating student appeals and complaints. The SPSO provides a route for those who have exhausted the University's appeals and complaints procedures, to refer their appeal or complaint for independent review, where they are dissatisfied with the handling of the internal appeals or complaints procedure. Once the SPSO has made a judgement, it would be for the University Court to decide whether or not to accept the judgement and on any remedial action to be taken.</u>*
>
> *Students whose appeals are not upheld by the University, or who have not submitted their appeal or documentary evidence by the required timescales (paragraphs 4.1, 5.1 and 6.3 refer), will be informed of the procedures for ~~seeking independent review of the University's decision in this regard~~ <u>referral of their appeal to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for independent review.</u>"*

POLICY ON ACADEMIC APPEALS

8.1 The Committee approved the following revision (deletions scored through, additions shown in bold) to paragraph 8 of the University's Policy on Academic Appeals and paragraph 8.9 of the accompanying Guidance Note.

8.2 These revisions were proposed because it had come to light during the operation of the revised Policy (approved by Senate in February 2004) that the procedures to be followed where a Vice-Principal considers that a case for an appeal were not consistently explained in the Policy and the Guidance Note.

Policy on Academic Appeals

8.   *Academic appeals will be reviewed to determine their competency, i.e. that they do not question academic judgement; that they are based on grounds of procedure, competency and/or prejudice; that supporting evidence has been provided; and that they have been submitted in accordance with the time limits indicated in 4 and 5 above. Where an appeal satisfies these conditions, a response to the appeal will be requested from the relevant member of academic staff who may, after discussion with others as appropriate (e.g. the Examiners), agree that the appeal should be upheld. If the appeal is not upheld at this stage, the response from the relevant member of academic staff and the student's Statement of Appeal will be reviewed by a Vice-Principal, who will decide whether or not a case for an appeal appears to exist. ~~In such cases, the response to the appeal from the relevant member of academic staff and the Vice-Principal's decision as to whether or not a case for an appeal appears to exist will be sent to the appellant.~~ If the Vice-Principal considers that a case for an appeal does not appear to exist, the appellant will be **sent a copy of the response from the relevant member of academic staff and will be** informed of the reasons for the Vice-Principal's decision. **In such cases,** ~~Notwithstanding the Vice-Principal's decision,~~ appellants will be informed that they may request that their appeal be considered by the Senate Academic Appeals Committee. **If the Vice-Principal considers that a case for an appeal appears to exist, the person who responded to the appeal will be informed of the Vice-Principal's reasons for this decision. Unless the person who responded to the appeal upholds the appeal on the basis of the Vice-Principal's comments, the appeal will be referred to the Senate Academic Appeals Committee for consideration.** [Guidance Notes 8, 9 and 10, respectively, give details of the procedures to be followed by the Vice-Principal and details of the composition of, and procedures to be followed by, the Senate Academic Appeals Committees].*

Guidance Notes for students concerning Academic Appeals

8.9   *If the Vice-Principal determines that there appears to be grounds for an appeal, ~~a letter informing you of the decision will be sent to you within seven days and will be copied to~~ the "relevant person" who initially responded to your appeal **will be informed of the Vice-Principal's reasons for this decision. Unless the person who responded to the appeal upholds the appeal on the basis of the Vice-Principal's comments,** ~~If the relevant person decides to uphold your appeal at this stage, you will be informed accordingly: otherwise, the Vice-Principal will refer~~ your appeal **will be referred** to the relevant Senate Academic Appeals Committee. You will be informed of the next available date that the Senate Academic Appeals Committee will meet. You have the right to attend the hearing of your appeal, provided you have complied with paragraphs 7.7 and 7.8."*

REMIT AND COMPOSITION FOR 2005/06

9.   The Committee noted the remit and composition of the UCTL for 2005/06.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/007)

REPORT TO THE FUNDING COUNCIL ON ITR ACTIVITY 2004/05

10.   One key feature of the introduction of the new Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) from August 2003 was the agreement to end the programme of external subject reviews and to give institutions the flexibility to determine how to conduct their internal reviews of their provision. The Funding Council, at that time, asked to be kept informed by institutions of the progress and outcome of internal reviews and their engagement with Professional and Statutory Bodies. This information is required as a condition of grant to ensure that (i) provision is of an acceptable quality and (ii) that all institutions have an appropriate strategy for quality enhancement. The Committee noted the Annual Institutional Statement on Internal Review Activity for 2004/05 which had been submitted to the Funding Council in September 2005.

(paper filed as UCTL/211005/008)

WORKING GROUP ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

11.   The Committee noted that Professor Gordon Walkden had taken over as Convener of the Working Group on Personal Development Planning following the previous Convener's appointment as Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching).

WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT & GRADUATE FEEDBACK

12.1   The Committee noted that Professor Mary Cotter had taken over as Convener of the Working Group on Student & Graduate Feedback as Dr Fennell, the previous Convener, is on sabbatical in 2005/06.

12.2   The Committee further noted that the Working Group was working on further revisions to Part A of the SCEF Form (an earlier draft having been considered by the UCTL in May 2005). This draft currently includes 10 questions with space for comments leaving space for Schools to add Part b questions. The draft was due to be considered at the next meeting of the Working Group and would also be included for consideration at the next meetings of Heads of School and the UCTL.

TEACHING QUALITY INFORMATION (TQI) WEBSITE

13.   The Committee noted that the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) Website was now live and could be accessed at www.tqi.ac.uk. This website provides statistical information on entry qualifications, progression data and first destinations by subject area together with general information on teaching quality including links to QAA reviews (including ELIR) and to information on how External Examiners' Reports are used (in the case of English HEIs, they are required to publish the External Examiner Reports themselves). The information provided on the website is intended to give easy access for prospective students and other members of the public to information about the quality of higher education.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT THEMES 2005/06

14.1   The Committee were pleased to note that Dr David McCausland had been invited to serve on the Steering Committee for the First Year Enhancement Theme.

14.2   The work of the First Year Enhancement theme will build on relevant outcomes of the Assessment and Responding to Student Needs themes. The main challenge for this theme will be to identify ways of supporting first year students on becoming more effective and autonomous learners. This will require careful consideration of a range of inter-related academic issues, including assessment methods, academic support and evaluation of achievement, with a view to enhancing student learning, achievement and, ultimately, retention. In addition, it will potentially give attention to issues of student motivation in the first year, strategies for coping with large numbers of students having a wide range of skills and backgrounds, and how "foundational knowledge" is most effectively acquired.

14.3   The second Theme running in 2005/06 is on the topic of Integrative Assessment: Optimising the Balance between Formative and Summative Assessment. This programme of work will have three main aims:

(1)   To review and synthesise key findings research, evaluation and documented practices from Scotland, the rest of the UK and internationally which are relevant to the theme of optimising the formative/summative balance in approaches to assessment.

(2)   To identify and document an appropriately wide and representative range of instances of good practice, drawn from across the Scottish sector, which exemplified the core theme.

(3)   To select and more systematically evaluate and report on a sub-set of (2), judged to be particularly significant exemplars of practice and likely to have resonance across institutions and subject areas.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT THEME 2004/05: FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

15.   The Committee noted that under the Flexible Delivery Theme, six development projects had been established to run from July – December 2005 to address aspects relating to the development of flexibility in pedagogy, learner support and infrastructure as detailed below:

(i)   Investigation at the strategic level into the issues surrounding 'Flexible Delivery' in the Scottish Higher Education System

(ii)   Supporting the development of the flexible curriculum: flexible entry and flexible programmes

(iii)   A model for effective implementation of flexible programme delivery

(iv)   Scottish higher education developers' on-line and distributed services

(v)   Using e-learning to support flexible delivery *

(vi)   The use of virtual learning environments for Higher Education in Scotland *

          * Note: these two projects will be closely linked.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT THEMES 2003/04

16.   The Committee noted that the final publications arising from the 2003/04 Quality Enhancement Themes on Assessment and Responding to Student Needs had now been published. Hard copies are available for consultation in the Senate Office or can be accessed on the Quality Enhancement Themes website at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk

**ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WORKING TOWARDS THE RESIT
OF AN EXAMINATION OR RESUBMISSION OF AN ASSIGNMENT**

17.1   The Committee noted that, during the summer, the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning), on behalf of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL), had approved the following:

- All registered students (both full-time and part-time students as well as those who have withdrawn from study but who have elected to take up Associate Student Status) are entitled to reasonable support from academic staff if they are working towards the resit of an examination or the resubmission of an assignment.

- Subject specific support would be complementary to any support provided by the Academic Learning & Study Unit (ALSU). ALSU will offer support with learning strategies and writing/revision/exam techniques.

- Students who are withdrawn from study (and who have not registered as an Associate Student) but who will be taking examinations as an external candidate do not have the automatic expectation of academic support.

17.2   Students would be reminded that they are eligible for such support via the Student Portal when registration for resits occurs. Colleges were asked to advise all academic staff of this clarification of the entitlement of students to academic support.