UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2006

Present: Ms C Macaslan (Convener), Professor G Burgess, Professor MA Cotter, Dr P Edwards, Ms F Keefe, Dr WF Long, 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 P Fantom, Mr R Miller, Dr A Reid, Ms S Ross, Dr T Webb and Dr G Mackintosh (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Miss A Harper

MINUTES

29.   The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2005 were approved. The Committee noted that the meetings of 3 February and 24 March had been cancelled.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/17)

UPDATE OF STRATEGIC PLAN 2004-2009 – PLAN 2006/07

30.1   The Committee received the draft Strategic Plan 2006/07. The Committee was, in particular, asked to focus on the following sections: Quality People (Section 1), Quality Learning (Section 3) and Access and Participation (Section 6).

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/18)

30.2   The Director of Planning gave a brief outline of the draft Plan and the ongoing process of update for 2006/07. Acknowledging the late circulation of the Plan, the Committee was asked to submit comments by email to the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning) by Monday 5 June.

Action: Clerk

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY

31.1   The Committee received the new Equality and Diversity Strategy and an oral report on the background to this paper from the Equal Opportunities Adviser. It was noted that the Strategy had been developed by the Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities and would serve as an over-arching strategy.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/19)

31.2   The Committee approved the Strategy subject to the following minor changes. In the Operational Plan, it was proposed that the following revisions to lead sections should be made:

- UCTL and Registry to replace Heads of Schools as Lead Sections on Integrating Equality and Diversity Strategies into the delivery of Teaching and Learning and UCTL to be added to the group of Lead Sections on the Teachability Initiative
- The Equal Opportunities Adviser to consult the Equality and Diversity Committee on the list of confidential information (section 1.4)

Action: JC

31.3   The Committee further noted that there continues to be an issue of religious commitments clashing with students' university obligations. This is becoming an area of increased significance that is especially affecting field courses and study trips. The Committee agreed that it would be helpful if the Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities could give consideration to this issue.

Action: JC

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

32.1   The Committee received an oral report on the current Industrial Action situation from the Convener.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/20)

32.2   The impact of the action was variable across the University with some Schools largely unaffected. The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and the Registry had been working closely with Heads of School to manage the situation.

32.3   The Convener stated that exams and invigilation were proceeding as planned and graduations were on schedule. A meeting with Heads of School would be arranged for the week beginning 29 May to further address issues of assessment. Priority has been given to marking of assessments for exiting students and thereafter to pre-Honours. The Academic Registrar confirmed that Heads of School were to be asked to provide updates on how marking coursework and exams was progressing.

32.4   The Students' Association confirmed that they were satisfied with the current steps being taken by the University on this matter.

LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY

33.1   The Committee received the new Learning and Teaching Strategy.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/21)

33.2   The Committee noted concern raised by some members in regard to the steady workload increase reported by the Educational and Staff Development Unit and the impact this may have on delivery of certain aspects of the Strategy.

33.3   The Committee approved the Strategy with minor changes to section 7 to reflect the establishment of the new Directorate of Student and Academic Affairs. This will encompass the Careers Service, new Centre for Learning & Teaching, Student Support Services and the Registry. The Committee noted that members had had little time to consider the document and agreed that minor amendments could be emailed to the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning) by 8 June 2006.

Action: Clerk

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW – UPDATE ON ACTION PLAN

34.1   The Committee received the updated ELIR Action Plan, detailing progress made, to date, in regard to the recommendations set out in the ELIR report.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/22)

34.2 The Committee approved the recommendations set out in the Action Plan and the Annexes to the paper, with minor amendments to Annex B, Student Representation and Feedback to read, "..at least one for each programme at postgraduate level".

34.3 The Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning) reported that the One Year Follow-up Report is to be submitted to the QAA by 29th September 2006. This report will be circulated to UCTL members for comment before submission.

EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGY

35.1 The Committee received the Draft Report from the Employability Strategy Working Group for consideration. The Convener reminded members that this report had been drafted in October 2006.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/23)

35.2 The Committee agreed that an employability strategy is required by the University but proposed that the Strategy be re-examined in light of the creation of the Directorate of Student and Academic Affairs which will include the Careers Service. It was agreed that the Strategy should be brought back to UCTL for approval next session.

Action: Clerk

UPDATE ON PDP

36.1 The Committee received a PDP status report dated April 2006 from the PDP Working Group.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/24)

36.2 The Committee learned that the next meeting of the PDP Working Group would take place in early June with a view to identifying the preferred package to be used. It was agreed that the Recommendations from the meeting would be circulated to members by the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning).

Action: Clerk

REPORT ON WEBCT USE AND SUPPORT

37. The Committee received, for information, the Report on WebCT Use and Support for information. The Committee informed members that this report was being circulated to highlight the significant use of WebCT in the University.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/25)

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION – CLASS REPRESENTATIVES

38.1 The Committee received a Report on the Class Representative System at the University of Aberdeen from the Vice-Principal (Education & Employability) of the Students' Association.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/26)

38.2 The Committee discussed the paper and agreed that there is a need to raise awareness to the student body in regard to the impact that student representatives can have in regard to courses and programmes. Examples of change made as a result of student feedback should be broadcast to new student representatives to increase their awareness of the potential impact that their voice can have.

38.3 The Committee agreed that the Vice Principal (Education & Employability) of the Students' Association and her successor should meet with the Convener and the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning) to discuss the issues in the report including the possibility of establishing a new class representative database.

Action: Clerk

WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT AND GRADUATE FEEDBACK – REVISED SCEF

39.1 The Committee received an Interim Report from the Working Group on Student and Graduate Feedback. The Convener of the Working Group gave a brief outline of the recommendations proposed.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/27)

39.2 She drew particular attention to the issue of whether or not it was appropriate for questions on Part B of the form to name members of staff. It was noted that the Working Group had had much debate in regard to this issue. The Committee agreed that the appropriateness of this should be checked with Human Resources in case any contractual issues exist which may restrict this practice. If HR is content with this practice then it was agreed that the decision on whether or not to name names should be left to the discretion of the Schools.

Action: Clerk

39.3 The Committee agreed that the new SCEF form be used with effect from session 2006/07 and that the use of the revised form should be monitored and the results reported back to UCTL next session.

39.4 It was further noted that the remit of the Working Group extended to consideration of a need for programme-level feedback. The Committee approved the Working Group's recommendation that consideration of this matter should be deferred in the light of the University's decision to enter the National Student Survey with effect from 2006/07.

INTERIM REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON THE
COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE

40.1 The Committee received an Interim Report from the Working Group on the Common Assessment Scale. The Convener outlined the background leading to the Committee's interim report which proposed that the current issues with the CAS system might be addressed through alignment of the CAS scale with a linear percentage scale with the CAS being used for reporting purposes and the % scale for purposes of combining marks.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/28)

40.2 There followed wider-ranging debate in regard to this proposal with some members of the Committee raising concern in regard to the proposed move back to the use of percentage marks in the combination of CAS marks. After some discussion if was agreed that the CAS Working Group should reconvene to consider these comments.

Action: Clerk

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS, SUPERVISORS, HEADS OF SCHOOL, HEADS OF GRADUATE SCHOOL AND COLLEGE POSTGRADUATE OFFICERS

41.1 The Committee received the Code of Practice for Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/29)

41.2 The Committee agreed on some minor amendments to be made to the document. The wording in Section 7 is to be changed to read, "Each research student will have *at least* one supervisor." Section 7.1 is to be amended so that paragraph 3 ends at "frequent meetings."

41.3 The Committee agreed that further amendments should be submitted to the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning). The Code of Practice will then go a sub-committee of UCTL for approval and to Senate at the start of next session.

MONITORING STUDENTS' PROGRESS & CLASS CERTIFICATES – ISSUES RAISED BY THE SENATE

42.1 The Committee received a paper on Monitoring Students' Progress and Class Certificates, addressing a number of issues raised by the Senate at its meeting on 3 May 2006.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/30)

42.2 The Committee approved the recommendations proposed to address the issues raised by the Senate in regard to (i) the feedback provided to Schools before they refuse a Class Certificate and (ii) the criteria under which appeals against Class Certificate refusal might be upheld in order to assist Heads of School in reaching decisions to withhold Class Certificates. In regard to (ii), it was noted that proposed criteria to address this would be brought to the meeting for consideration.

Action: Clerk

DEMONSTRATING IN PHYSICS

43.1 The Committee received a paper on the proposal by the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences that Level 4 students should be awarded academic credit for demonstrating and tutoring Level 1 students.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/31)

43.2 The proposal has been discussed by the College Learning and Teaching Committee and the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate), the latter of whom had agreed that the matter should be referred to the UCTL for discussion of the general principles raised by this proposal.

43.3 Following discussion, the Committee agreed that it would not be appropriate for level 4 students to receive credit for demonstrating/tutoring level 1 students. It was felt that the proposal would create a disparity between undergraduate student demonstrators who would receive payment and credit versus postgraduate demonstrators who would only receive payment. Furthermore, in light of the ongoing work in regard to PDP, it was felt there may be alternative ways to recognise this type of activity rather than the award of credit. Other issues in regard to ensuring the quality of assessment, the level of credit to be awarded and the role of the External in the assessment of this course were also raised. The Committee agreed that consideration should be given to alternative kinds of rewards the students may be offered.

PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING PROGRESSION AND AWARD IN MODULARISED POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES OF STUDY (*GRADE SPECTRUM*)

44.1 The Committee approved the proposed amendments (highlighted as track changes) to the procedures for determining progression and award in modularised postgraduate taught programmes of study, which would clarify the new procedures introduced for 2005/06. These were approved by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) at their meeting on 10 March 2006.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/32)

44.2 At this meeting the ASC also agreed that the existing wording for the Award of Master's Degree with Commendation or Distinction was unclear and should be amended as follows:

For Commendation: Marks at **15 or better** in elements constituting three quarters of the total assessment, inclusive of the project/dissertation (which must also be graded at 15 or better).

For Distinction: Marks at **18 or better in** elements constituting three quarters of the total assessment, inclusive of the project/dissertation (which must also be graded at 18 or better).

ITEMS APPROVED BY CIRCULATION

45. The Committee noted that due to the cancellation of the last meeting, the following items had been approved by Convener's permission: Guidance for Heads of School in regard to resit provision at level 4 and above; proposals for the future operation of the system for monitoring students' progress and class certificates; the provision for students to consume bottled water in exams; the Equality and Diversity Policy and the Policy on Age Diversity.

EXTERNAL EXAMINING DATABASE

46.1 The Committee noted that the planned web-based database for managing external examiner reports would not be in place for the return of 2005/06 reports. They noted that the Registry is currently working with Corporate Systems to develop this system which it was planned would be in place during session 2006/07. Schools and Colleges would be consulted before development work commenced to ensure that the new database meets the needs of all users. The new web-based system would mimic the existing paper-based system but would have the additional functionality to enable users to monitor the aspects of the process relating to their School or College through a secure password access to the system.

46.2   In view of the above, the Committee noted that the existing paper-based system would operate for the 2005/06 external examiner reports.

POSTGRADUATE CATALOGUE OF COURSES

47.   The Committee noted that a significant number of course details had now been input into the Postgraduate Catalogue of Courses. It was anticipated that this would go 'live' in the near future with Schools remaining able to add further course details.

ELECTRONIC ADVISING, REGISTRATION AND MATRICULATION

48.   The Committee noted the attached paper which outlined the plans being taken forward by the Registry and DISS in regard to the development of a system of electronic advising, registration and matriculation which it was planned would be implemented with effect from August 2006.

(copy filed as UCTL/260506/33)

QE THEME ON THE FIRST YEAR
(Minute 28.2 refers)

49.1   The Committee noted that the updated version of the Scoping Paper for the First Year QE Theme was available at:
       www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/defaultpage131cd0BlueSub.aspx?pageID=242

49.2   The Convener reported that a number of Projects were being planned and institutions were being encouraged to bid for these with £10,000 being available to support the project work. It was hoped that the University would bid for one of these.

Action: CM

REVIEW OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK

50.1   The Committee noted the process and timescale for the review of the Quality Enhancement Framework as detailed in the circular letter from the Funding Council available at:
       http://www.sfc.ac.uk/library/06854fc203db2fbd0000010a023cee5a/

50.2   The Committee further noted that the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching & Learning) would attend the workshop being held by the Funding Council on 8 June. The outcome of this workshop would contribute to the review of the Framework.

LEARNING TO IMPROVE – QUALITY APPROACHES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

51.1   The Committee noted the Scottish Executive's report "Learning to Improve – Quality Approaches for Lifelong Learning" available at:
       http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47121/0020541.pdf

51.2 This report, published in December 2005, sets out the Executive's strategy for improving quality across post-compulsory education. Key themes in the report are:

- that learners should be at the centre
- that further work needs to be done to ensure that the learner's voice is heard by educators
- that to achieve improvement we need to move from a compliance approach to a more productive relationship between education providers and external quality assurance agencies
- that to make a real improvement the focus has to shift from 'teaching' to 'supporting learning' and that there has to be a culture of effective reflection and improvement in performance.

51.3 The report highlights five areas for action:

- **creating more demanding learners** by: building aspirations and expectations; helping learners develop their personal vision and to become more self-directed lifelong learners; encouraging more positive interaction between learners and educators; strengthening student associations' support for and advocacy for learners; and amplifying the voice of learners through systematic research
- **building management and organisational capacity for improvement** by: supporting and strengthening quality cultures in providers; continuing to give priority to staff and team development; and more consciously building understanding of how people learn into programmes
- **developing funding and purchasing approaches to support quality** by: supporting and developing local management capacity; using 'relationship contracting' approaches to build capacity; and by taking care with the use of inevitably partial performance indicators
- **maintaining the value of qualifications** by: speeding up and strengthening a 'learning cycle' between educators, learners, the economy and employers to ensure courses and qualifications are up to date and 'worth something'; being clear that the processes and mechanisms to promote excellence in quality of service and standards of qualifications are very different; and considering the balance between subject/technical content and skills, and learners' growth in programme design and qualifications
- **developing quality review approaches** by: explicitly basing them on learner-centred and quality improvement models; reforming and re-expressing them from the learner perspective; re-emphasising external quality agencies' purpose as evaluative support to help providers improve; and creating new relationships between the different quality agencies, founded on mutual recognition, to continue the work of reducing overlap and to stimulate common development work.

RACE EQUALITY AUDIT TOOLKIT PILOT

52.1 The Committee noted that Universities Scotland was currently developing a Race Equality Audit Toolkit for academics. The purpose of the Toolkit would be to help in assessing how courses and the curriculum can promote race equality, provide examples of how race equality could be built in and provide an opportunity for reflection and evaluation.

52.2 The University of Aberdeen has agreed to pilot the Toolkit. The pilot would take place between May and July 2006. Heads of College were currently considering which Schools/discipline groups could participate. The University has supported the development of the Toolkit since the idea was created and believes participation in the pilot will be beneficial.

52.3 Further information can be gained from Mrs J Chalmers, Equal Opportunities Adviser, tel: 01224 273165 or janine.chalmers@abdn.ac.uk

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL : DEVELOPING A NEW STRATEGY

53.1 The Committee noted the Scottish Funding Council's current consultation in regard to their development of their new strategy and corporate plan. A copy of the consultation document can be accessed at: www.sfc.co.uk/library/sfc/consultation/2006

53.2 The draft corporate plan sets out the Council's vision of the central role they expect colleges and universities to play in the development of an economically and socially prosperous Scotland over the next ten years. The draft plan identifies the following seven strategic aims that it plans to work towards in partnership with its partners:

1. coherent, high quality lifelong learning provision for the economy and society;
2. fair access to, and availability to further and higher education for, learners and potential learners and support their progression;
3. relevant skills and learning provision to meet the current and future needs of employers and the modern economy;
4. world-class basic and applied research which enhances the economic, social and cultural well-being of Scotland and its people;
5. effective transfer of knowledge, expertise and ideas to stimulate innovation in the economy, society and culture;
6. a tertiary education system in Scotland which is international in its outlook and engages effectively with other relevant bodies across the world;
7. each member of the partnership of colleges, universities and the Council is well-led and self-improving thereby delivering this strategy efficiently, effectively and coherently for Scotland.

53.3 Key cross-cutting themes identified in the pre-consultation as priority issues for the new strategy were: the economy; internationalisation; the development of coherent learning provision in Scotland; partnership working and the strategic leadership role of the Council; learner-centredness; equal opportunities and sustainability.

DATES OF MEETINGS IN 2006/07

54. The Committee noted that meetings in 2006/07 would be held as under:

Friday 20 October 2006 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2
Friday 8 December 2006 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2
Friday 2 February 2007 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2
Friday 23 March 2007 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2
Friday 25 May 2007 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2