UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2007

Present: Ms CA Macaslan (Convener), Professor GJA Burgess, Professor MA Cotter, Dr P Edwards, Mr J Hardey, Professor WF Long, Mr R Miller, Dr W Naphy, Mrs M Pearson, Professor T Salmon, Dr P Schlicke, Professor G Walkden, Professor FB Watson and Dr M Young with Dr G Mackintosh, Mr D Paterson (*vice Mrs J McAndrews*) Ms P Spence, Dr T Webb and Dr R Bernard (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Dr P Davidson, Mr M Radford Mrs L Stephen, Mr P Haley, Ms L MacDonald and Mrs J McAndrews.

MINUTES

67.1   The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2007
(copy filed as UCTL/020207/55)

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

67.2   The Committee noted that guidance on the operation of the monitoring and class certificate had now been circulated to Schools (minute 55.2 refers).

67.3   The Committee noted that the Personal Development Planning (PDP) pilots in the Colleges of Arts & Social Sciences and Physical Sciences had been rolled out during the week. Much of the generic information to be included in the PDPs was currently under development. Detailed updates on the progress of the project would be brought to the Committee in due course (minute 56.2 refers).

67.4   The Convener informed the Committee that, as anticipated, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) had made funding available to enable the University to take forward the employability agenda. The funding available, which would be based on student numbers, would provide c.£38,000 per year for a four-year period. In order for funds to be released, the University would be required to submit a development plan to the SFC (minute 56.2 refers).

Action: TW/PF

67.5   The Committee noted that the changes proposed to the policy regarding who was permitted to act as examination invigilators would be forwarded to the next meeting of Senate on 28 February 2007 (minute 58 refers).

STUDENT RETENTION

68.1   The Committee received a paper setting out the main outcomes and actions arising from a Student Retention Work Day held on 9 January 2007.
(copy filed as UCTL/020207/56)

68.2   The Committee noted that the paper had already been discussed widely, and had been considered by the University Management Group.

68.3   The Committee focused its detailed discussions on the issues which relate retention and progression to University induction. In general, it was agreed that more emphasis should be placed on induction and the view that the induction process extends beyond the first week of the year should be reinforced. In the course of these discussions, the following main points emerged:

- The Committee noted that currently there is no coherent overview of induction. Currently induction falls into two categories: academic, usually carried out at the school-level, and social, which is predominately undertaken by the Students' Association during Freshers Week. The Committee were particularly concerned that academic induction should be reviewed. It was agreed that the University should review how students are supported through the academic induction period and how, in turn, this is built upon to provide support for progression.

- The Committee acknowledged that there were specific problems for students joining large classes during their first year at the University. These students are most at risk of feeling that they are not in touch with their intended degree subject. The Committee suggested that in such areas, Schools might consider the following: arranging meetings during the early weeks of students grouped by degree intention; group activities, both social and academic; and where appropriate arranging groups by degree intention within practical classes.

- The Committee agreed that the University should seek to start induction prior new students arriving on campus. Consideration should be given to the ways in which the University communicates with new students. The Committee were supportive of the idea that new entrants should have access to appropriate academics and academic material prior to registration. It was noted that in redesigning the induction process the University should be mindful not to overlook second half-session entrants. The Committee acknowledged that there are many practical issues which will need to be overcome to enable changes to be made to the induction process.

- The Committee acknowledged that an element of 'drip-feeding' of induction information throughout the summer prior to admission might be valuable. It was also acknowledged that whilst this information should have some degree intention specific content, there are also problems linked to students not being prepared to have to choose subsidiary subjects

- It was agreed that the University needs better information about why students leave the institution. It was acknowledged that sometimes information on such matters can be best acquired when students talk to other students rather than the 'administration'. It was noted that the Students' Association would be holding a meeting to discuss retention issues on 21 February.

68.4   The Committee agreed that in taking forward discussions and actions aimed at improving retention and progression it would be useful if schools would report on the actions that have been taken and their perceived effectiveness.

**DOUBLE MARKING OF SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS AT HONOURS
AND POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT LEVELS**

69.1   The Committee received a paper detailing the proposed system for selecting scripts for double marking and revisions to the criteria used for selecting scripts to be scrutinised by External Examiners.

(copy filed as UCTL/020207/57)

69.2 The Committee broadly supported the proposed new system. In general the Committee agreed that the proposed system for moderation was quite complicated and would require a significant amount of organisational work. However, it was acknowledged that, in the first instance, such a comprehensive moderation system would be necessary to ensure that the University can maintain confidence in its systems for marking. It was agreed that in time, as confidence in the new system grows, it may be possible to revisit the requirements.

69.3 The Committee noted that Heads of School had requested that the system for moderation should not require full double-marking for all probationary staff. Heads of School wished to be able to use their discretion in this area.

69.4 It was further noted that once any changes to the University's marking policy was finally agreed, then the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) would write to all External Examiners to inform them of the changes.

69.5 For its part, the Committee approved the proposed new scheme and agreed that it should be forwarded to the next meeting of Senate. The Committee agreed to keep the amended system under review.

RECOGNITIONS AND EXEMPTIONS

70.1 The Committee received a proposal to change the distinction between Exemptions and Recognitions and the circumstances which would warrant their award.
(copy filed as UCTL/020207/58)

70.2 The Committee noted that the changes were being proposed in part to ensure that the degrees awarded students admitted with advanced standing, on the basis of the grades achieved in school-level qualifications, are compliant with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and in part to clarify the distinction between Recognitions and Exemptions.

70.3 In approving the proposals, the Committee agreed that, following consultation with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, Recognitions should be awarded to all appropriately qualified entrants, not just those seeking accelerated entry. The view of the Heads of School, that such credit should only be awarded for the purposes of accelerated entry, was acknowledged. However, the Committee agreed that if recognitions are to be available for non-HE equivalent qualifications, provided it is equivalent to SCQF level 7, these recognitions must have the same impact on the credit requirements for progression and graduation as those recognitions awarded in respect of any other qualifications. The Committee noted that for some prescribed degree programmes such recognitions would have no credit value for progression as in these programmes students are required to pass required subjects in addition to accruing specified credits.

UCTL ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE

70.4 In approving the Annual Report to Senate for 2005-2006 the Committee agreed that the format of the report should be revisited for 2006-2007. It was agreed that for next session the report should be more forward looking, with a view to generating discussion of issues for future consideration.
(copy filed as UCTL/270207/59a&b)

REGULATORY CHANGES

Degrees of Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Doctor of Surgery (ChM)

71.1   The Committee approved changes to the Degrees of MD and ChM to bring them fully in line with the General Regulations governing Postgraduate Research Awards.

(copy filed as UCTL/020207/60)

Omnibus Resolution

71.2   The Committee approved, for its part, the draft Resolution 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees'.

(copy filed as UCLL/020207/61

Draft Resolution 'Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Bachelor of Arts in Youth Work'

71.3   The Committee approved, for its part, the draft Resolution required for the award of degrees validated by the University and managed by the International Christian College.

(copy filed as UCTL/020207/62)

Graduation Dates

72.1   The Committee approved the dates and allocations of students for the July 2007 graduation ceremonies.

(copy filed as UCTL/020207/63)

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

73.1   The Committee noted that, for the first time this year, the University was participating in the National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS aimed to gather feedback on the quality of students' courses, to help inform the choices of future applicants to higher education, and to contribute to public accountability. The survey was targeted at final year undergraduates and had the backing of the National Union of Students (NUS). All publicly-funded higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 8 institutions in Scotland (including all 'ancients'), were included in the survey. The results of the 2007 survey would be published on the re-launched Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website, in summer 2007.

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT THEME

74.1   The Committee noted the request for assistance in identifying case studies for the various project teams undertaking work on the First Year Quality Enhancement Theme.

(copy filed as UCTL/020207/64)

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

75.1   The Committee noted that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) was to conduct a review of its policies on quality assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching in Scotland's colleges and universities.

75.2   The Council's working group, the Joint Quality Review Group (JQRG), would begin work during January 2007 and would make recommendations to the SFC in autumn 2007 on the approach to quality to be taken from the beginning of academic year 2008/09. As the current cycle of reviews for HE institutions ends in July 2007 the JQRG would be developing interim arrangements for the University sector for 2007/08 only.

In undertaking the review, the SFC had stated that it wished to build on the existing systems for quality assessment and enhancement, and to build on the strengths that the systems possessed. The Council had also stated that it wished to retain the strong emphasis that the existing approaches placed on: promoting quality cultures within institutions, going beyond compliance to quality enhancement, learner engagement, partnership working, joint ownership of quality and avoiding over-burdensome processes.

Further details regarding the remit of the JQRG could be found in the SFC Circular, available at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/library/06854fc203db2fbd00000110357f4976/

LEITCH REVIEW OF SKILLS: FINAL REPORT

76.1   The Committee noted that the Leitch Review of skills published its final report, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy: World-class skills*, on 5 December 2006. The Review was commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in December 2004, and was an independent review of "the long term skills needs of the economy including for intermediate and degree level skills".

76.2   The Review had found that the UK's skills base "remains weak by international standards". It recommended that the UK commit to becoming a world-leader in skills by 2020 by setting the following objectives[1]:

- 95 per cent of adults to achieve the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy, an increase from levels of 85 per cent literacy and 79 per cent numeracy in 2005;
- exceeding 90 per cent of adults qualified to at least Level 2, an increase from 69 per cent in 2005. A commitment to go further and achieve 95 per cent as soon as possible;
- shifting the balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3. Improving the esteem, quantity and quality of intermediate skills.
- exceeding 40 per cent of adults qualified to Level 4 and above, up from 29 per cent in 2005, with a commitment to continue progression.

76.3   The final objective related directly to the Higher Education sector. The report recommended "a rebalancing of the priorities of HE institutions to make available relevant, flexible and responsive provision that meets the high skills needs of employers and their staff".

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[1] Broad definitions. Adult means age 19 to State Pension age. Basic means everyday literacy and numeracy skills. Level 2 equates to 5 good GCSEs; Level 3 equates to 2 'A' levels; Level 4 equates to a degree (or their vocational equivalents).

76.4   The University would ensure that the issues relating to the HE sector contained in the report were taken into consideration as part of its work on employability.

The full text of the report could be found at:
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/

COMMUNICATION OF COMPUTING

77.1   The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate) would be approving a new course, Communication of Computing, at its meeting in March. This level 3 course was intended to improve students' communication skills and to involve students in promoting computing science. As part of the course some students would be involved in 'mentoring' level 1 computing science students. Given the nature of the course content the ASC(Ug) would be approving the course on a trial basis for one year with a report being produced for the ASC(Ug) next year, following the trial run. The ASC(Ug) would feed back findings to the UCTL in due course.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

78.1   The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Friday 23 March 2007 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2.