

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2007

Present: Ms C Macaslan (Convener), Professor G Burgess, Mr J Hardey, Miss A Harper, Mr D Hay, Dr MJ Hole, Professor WF Long and Mr P Schlicke with Ms K Christie, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms M Prather, Ms S Sithamparanathan, Ms P Spence, Dr R Bernard (Clerk) and Ms A Hogg in attendance

Apologies: Dr B Connolly, Ms A Fraser, Mr DP Lessels, Mrs L Stephen, Professor G Walkden and Dr MR Young

MINUTES

120. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2007.
(copy filed as UCTL/051207/80)

INTERNATIONALISATION

121. The Convener agreed to defer the discussion on internationalisation until the next meeting on 6 February 2008.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

- 122.1 The Committee received a report summarising the results obtained as part of the National Student Survey (NSS).
(copy filed as UCTL/051207/81)
- 122.2 The Convener sought comments from the Committee regarding the National Student Survey (NSS) which the University of Aberdeen took part in for the first time this year. Members questioned both the target and number of students who completed the questionnaire. Dr Mackintosh confirmed that Registry were currently in discussions regarding what students (which are extracted through HESA) the University could target in future returns.
- 122.3 Members agreed that the University should be looking for ways to improve feedback to students in respect of how the University has acted in response to information received through surveys. Mr Hardey commented that there was a general consensus amongst students that their feedback is not of importance and that 'nothing will ever get done or acted upon'. The Committee agreed that the University should be updating our students with information regarding improvements and developments within the University.
- 122.4 It was agreed that although the NSS was a very useful and valuable survey, the University needed to remember that the survey could perhaps be perceived as 'one-sided' as it only takes account of the students who complete their studies and not of those that choose to withdraw part way through their studies.
- 122.5 It was agreed that Schools should be encouraged to reflect on their individual data through their School Teaching and Learning Committees and the College Teaching and Learning Committees.

BURGESS GROUP FINAL REPORT: BEYOND THE HONOURS DEGREE CLASSIFICATION

- 126.1 The Committee received a report summarising the final report from the Burgess Group regarding honours degree classification.
(copy filed as UCTL/051207/82)
- 126.2 The Committee welcomed the development of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) but were in agreement that this was a major change across institutions. Members also agreed that it was extremely important to remember that efficient support would have to be in place to enable students to develop these 'other' skills.
- 126.3 The Committee discussed the emphasis employers place on 'other' skills. Some members agreed that a degree was simply a check-list and employers place higher/more emphasis on other transferable skills obtained at University, whilst other members were of the view that this is dependent on the employer/company/sector.

IMPROVING INDUCTION: REPORTING ON THE INITIATIVES FOR SEPTEMBER 2007 NEW ENTRANTS

- 127.1 The Committee received a report on Improving Induction: Reporting on the Initiatives for September 2007 New Entrants.
(copy filed as UCTL/051207/83)
- 127.2 The Convener reminded the Committee that this report summarised ways in which the University had sought to ease the transition to University for new entrants. It was noted that focus groups were still ongoing and that feedback would be given to them in terms of what the University did this year.
- 127.3 Members agreed that it was good practice to link the Students' Association events, with regards to new students, to those being undertaken by the University. However, some members felt that communication between Schools could have been better, so as to prevent specific events clashing. Dr Mackintosh reminded the Committee that given the complexity of the University's degree programmes it was unfortunately, inevitable, that some events would clash. Dr Mackintosh also reminded members that enhanced activities were being planned for January 2008 new entrants. These included updating the new student's website, more meet and greet for international students and guided tours. The Committee noted that January 2008 new entrants were predominantly made up of PG Taught students. All members were in agreement that the new student's website was an excellent development.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RETENTION

- 128.1 The Convener updated the Committee on a recent report which had looked at Undergraduate Student Retention.
(copy filed as UCTL/051207/84)
- 128.2 It was evident from the report that some discipline areas fell short in various areas. Members agreed that the University needs to 'drill down' and look at specific discipline areas rather than the University as a whole. In this way, the University would be able to target 'hot spots' from each area and address associated issues in a targeted manner.

- 128.3 Members agreed that the University needs to ensure they track those students who are highlighted as 'at risk' and put in place appropriate learning and support needs to assist them. The Committee were informed that data being gathered by the Registry from students who have withdrawn would be looked at carefully in case there was any evidence of 'specific issues' which could be addressed or ideas to help improve retention within the University.
- 128.4 The Convener noted that the best retention rates were found within the professional accredited areas e.g. Law, Engineering etc. It was suggested that other areas of study may be able to learn something from them.

RECOGNISING NON-ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTION

- 129.1 The Committee received a paper detailing a proposal for the University to recognise non-academic contribution.
(copy filed as UCTL/051207/85)
- 129.2 In approving the proposal to run a pilot scheme to recognise non-academic contribution, it was agreed that feedback regarding the project would be reported to the Committee in September 2008.
- 129.3 It was noted that the facility to input the recognition to the Student Record System was not currently available, however it was agreed by Dr Mackintosh, that in the interim a certificate would be produced for those students who are successful in having their non-academic contribution during their time at University recognised.
- 129.4 Members agreed that as the scheme to recognise non-academic contribution expands, and more students take up the opportunity to enhance their skills, that an appropriate support infrastructure will need to be in place.

POSTGRADUATE GRADE SPECTRUM

130. The Committee approved amendments to the Procedures for determining progression and award in modularised Postgraduate taught programmes of study (*Grade Spectrum*) to apply to programmes commencing in January/February each year and incorporating a dissertation that lies between two sessions of teaching, subject to confirmation being received from the Heads of Graduate Schools that they are content with the proposal.

Action: Clerk

[Clerk's Note: Following the meeting comments were received from the Head of Graduate School in the College of Arts and Social Sciences. As a result of these comments and discussions at ASC (PG) it was agreed that a Working Group should be established to look at the issues connected with the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum.]

(copy filed as UCTL/051207/86)

AMENDMENTS TO THE SUMMER EXAMINATION DIET (2008), POSTGRADUATE BUSINESS SCHOOL

131. On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) the Committee approved an alteration to the timing of the summer examination for students enrolled on the MBA programme. [Clerk's note: this request related only to examinations for MBA students.]

(copy filed as UCTL/051207/87)

Action: Clerk

START AND FINISH TIMES OF CLASSES

- 132.1 The Committee approved an insertion to the Academic Quality Handbook to formalise the convention that classes start at five minutes past the hour and finish five minutes to the hour.
- 132.2 It was agreed that a new section 6.12.3 should be inserted as follows:

“It is University policy that, although classes are timetabled to commence on the hour, they should start at five minutes past the hour and finish at five minutes to the hour. This convention is intended to permit students sufficient time to move between classes in different buildings. It also assists academic and support staff to organise materials and technology for subsequent classes.”

Action: Clerk

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL CONSULTATION: THE REPORT OF THE JOINT QUALITY REVIEW GROUP

133. The Committee noted the University's response to the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) consultation on the report of the Joint Quality Review Group, which had been submitted to the SFC in November 2007.

(copy filed as UCTL/051207/88)

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

134. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 6 February 2008 in Committee Room 3.