

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2008

Present: Ms CA Macaslan (Convener), Professor AJ Black, Professor G Burgess, Dr B Connolly, Professor MA Cotter, Ms A Fraser, Mr J Hardey, Mr D Hay, Dr GTA McEwan, Professor T Salmon, Professor G Walkden and Dr MR Young with Ms K Christie, Ms A Hogg, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms S Sithamparanathan, Mr D Paterson, Ms P Spence and Dr R Bernard (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Dr P Edwards, Miss A Harper, Dr MJ Hole, Mr DP Lessels, Professor WF Long, Mr P Schlicke and Mrs L Stephen

MINUTES

135. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2007.
(copy filed as UCTL/040208/89)

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION: INTERNATIONALISATION

- 136.1 The Convener opened the discussion on Internationalisation by highlighting/outlining the following areas:

- The role of study abroad
- The profile of the student population and its implications
- The benefits and challenges for teaching from having international students
- Internationalising of the curriculum: what might this mean?

- 136.2 Many aspects were then discussed with several points covering a number of areas. During the wide ranging discussion which followed, several key points emerged:

- Internationalised curriculum. The Committee agreed that the University should consider incorporating global perspectives more widely amongst existing degree programmes to enable greater curriculum access for international students. The Committee also discussed the increasing numbers of students from different nationalities to particular degree programmes e.g. increasing Polish students coming to undertake language degrees. Discussion then followed as to whether the University should be adapting degree programmes accordingly.
- International staff. It was agreed that the University should be developing staff internationally by drawing ideas from existing international staff and further promotion of engagement in international research.
- Student exchange programmes. The Committee were in agreement that the University needs to encourage students to study abroad more. The University currently offers an effective/efficient exchange programme but members agreed that this needs to be developed further i.e. encourage participation to ensure maximum potential. The Committee agreed that finance may be a potential stumbling block for some students participating in overseas exchanges.
- Develop programmes which involves more study abroad, along with developing strong partnerships with international links. The Committee agreed that the University should endeavour to partnerships with international links along with further development of programmes to include more study abroad options.

- Increased promotion of Industrial Placements within programmes (including both European and International). Members were in agreement that this could be potentially appealing aspect to students as it provides students with a 'global' experience especially with regards to their employability prospect. This 'global' experience could also be extremely appealing to potential graduate employers.
- Co-curriculum / non academic contribution. Discussion surrounded the various activities/societies/clubs currently on offer within the University and members agreed that other religions and cultures should be catered for and not just Scottish culture. It was noted that that development of this could encourage/develop greater participation between home and international students.
- Develop support services (including language and cultural skills, pastoral support). Several members agreed that it was crucial for the University to ensure that sufficient 'international' support services were developed to cater for the needs of students from other cultures.
- Proposed 'International' school. One member suggested a new recruitment stream by proposing an 'International' school as a feeder into intended degree programmes.
- Educate PhD supervisors to manage international students re. thesis submission and in particular dealing with plagiarism. This point raised much discussion amongst the Committee and it was agreed that this was something that needed to be addressed promptly.
- Embed language skills within our programmes.

136.3 Overall the Committee agreed that internationalisation should not be something only of relevance to international students but instead the University should be grounding institutional practices across both academic and non-academic activities.

RECORDING OF MARKS ON TRANSCRIPTS

137.1 The Committee received a paper detailing a proposal for amending the way marks are recorded on marks on transcripts.

(copy filed as UCTL/040208/90)

137.2 In approving the proposal that the current format of student transcripts be amended to show all CAS marks achieved, including those which are fails, the Committee agreed with Heads of School that the transcript should be a true record of course achievement.

137.3 The Committee were intrigued at the prospect of the possible implementation of the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR), as proposed by the Burgess Group, but accepted that work was still currently ongoing and full details of the HEAR have yet to be determined.

137.4 The Committee were therefore happy to approve the proposal that the current format of student transcripts be amended to show all CAS marks achieved, including those which are fails. However, Dr Mackintosh reminded the Committee that should the proposal be approved, there may be a time delay before the agreed amendments are implemented, due to programme resource constraints.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER NOMINATIONS

138.1 The Committee received a paper detailing a proposal that the External Examiner Nomination process be amended to require a brief career synopsis of the proposed external is submitted with the nomination form.

(copy filed as UCTL/040208/91)

- 138.2 Members were informed by Professor Cotter, who had chaired the recent Heads of School meeting which had discussed this proposal, that Heads of School were not supportive of the proposal because it appeared to call into question the judgement of the Head of School signing the form. Heads of School also argued that the proposed amendment to procedures added greatly to the bureaucratic burden already placed on them.
- 138.3 Although comments/feedback from the recent Heads of School meeting were considered and noted, the Committee were in agreement that this proposal should be approved.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES INITIATIVE

- 139.1 The Committee received a report/paper on the mobile technologies initiative detailing a broad indication of the direction of the initiative.
(copy filed as UCTL/040208/92)
- 139.2 The Convener sought comments from the Committee regarding the general approach of the proposed development and how the project might be taken forward.
- 139.3 In general members were in agreement that the time was right to move with mobile technology and embrace it. Members agreed that the learning and teaching experience at the University of Aberdeen would be significantly enhanced by the integration of mobile information technology into the curriculum and into the wider University environment itself. It was noted that other institutions were also moving quickly in terms of mobile technology initiatives, however it was agreed that this initiative should be very much a 'growing approach' and would take time to fully implement.
- 139.4 Members agreed that equity was key to any implementation. The University needs to ensure that any proposed initiative does not disadvantage any student, particularly when embedding it within the curriculum e.g. equity of systems used across the University must be accessible for all types of users (Mac/Windows etc). Several Committee members noted the use of the word 'mandatory' within the report, however the Convener confirmed that loan machines would be available to students, should this be required, in relation to any changes in curriculum.
- 139.5 In relation to this, members agreed that embedding mobile technologies within the curriculum would be the time consuming part and Ms Spence, highlighted that this also had huge implications for the Centre for Learning and Teaching. The Committee were in agreement that the need for additional support e.g. Helpdesk, which would most certainly have to be costed in to the plan. The Convener agreed that that University Management Group (UMG) would discuss various costings accordingly.
- 139.6 Members were also informed by the Convener that Heads of School were currently working with Estates to identify every 'nook and cranny' within the University which could be built upon to develop more learning and social spaces to assist in the implementation of this initiative.

EMPLOYABILITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

140. The Convener agreed to defer the discussion on employability development plan until the next meeting on 13 March 2008.
(copy filed as UCTL/040208/93)

UCTL ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE

141. The Committee noted the Annual Report to Senate for 2006/2007.
(copy filed as UCTL/040208/94)

REGULATORY CHANGES

1. Degree of Master of Physics

142. The Committee approved, for its part, the draft Resolution 'Regulations for the Degree of Master of Physics (MPhys)' to enable the University to be able to offer an MPhys degree, in line with many other Scottish institutions (*copy filed as UCTL/040208/95*). The new degree will be an undergraduate honours degree which requires either an extended research project or an industrial placement in the final year.

2. Omnibus Resolution

143. The Committee approved, for its part, the draft Resolution 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees'. The Resolution enacts the changes in Degree Regulations recommended by the Academic Standards Committees since March 2007.
(*copy filed as UCTL/040208/96*)

3. Joint Degree Awarding Powers

- 144.1 The Committee approved, for its part, the Draft Resolution "General Regulations for awards conferred jointly with other degree awarding institutions".
- 144.2 Dr Mackintosh briefed the Committee on the background to the Joint Degree Awarding Powers and stressed that although the concept may be appealing, such agreements are extremely complex to negotiate, and she urged Schools to act with caution in this regard.
(*copy filed as UCTL/040208/97*)

GRADUATION DATES

145. The Committee approved the dates and allocations of students for the July 2008 Graduation Ceremonies.
(*copy filed as UCTL/040208/98*)

AMENDMENT TO THE RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF PRESCRIBED ASSESSMENTS AND WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS FOR DEGREES OR DIPLOMAS

146. The Committee approved amendments to the rules covering prescribed assessments and written exams to prohibit the use of all electronic devices, including mobile phones. Where applicable calculators will still be permitted, but it will not be permissible to use a mobile phone as a calculator or for keeping time. This amendment is intended to prevent students using electronic devices, which are often web-enabled, as a means of cheating in examinations, and hence the possession of such a device in an assessment/examination situation will become a disciplinary offence. In addition, the Committee is asked to approve further minor amendments to the "Rules for Candidates" which are intended to clarify procedures to be followed in examination venues.
(*copy filed as UCTL/040208/99*)

REVIEW OF THE POSTGRADUATE GRADE SPECTRUM

147. The Committee noted that, at their meeting in December 2007, the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) agreed to set up a small working group to review the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum. The Committee approved the following membership: Professor Gordon Burgess (Convener), three Heads of Graduate School, one Postgraduate Officer from each College (Dr Douglas Hay, Professor David Lurie and Dr George Coghill), and a student member yet to be confirmed.

SENATE WORKING GROUP ON ACADEMIC AND PASTORAL SUPPORT

148. The Committee noted that the Senate had formed a working group to review the Support Systems provided for students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) and to come forward with recommendations for enhancement to the existing academic and pastoral support mechanisms with a view to their implementation, where possible, with effect from September 2008. The Group would be submitting an interim report to UCTL in March 2008.

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF RESEARCH THESES

- 149.1 At its meeting on 14 December 2007, the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) was invited to consider the proposal that, from 1 October 2008, it be mandatory for each Postgraduate Research student to submit 1 paper copy and 1 electronic copy of their sustained thesis. University regulations currently require each research student to submit two hard bound copies of their thesis to the Registry which are then deposited in the University Library.
- 149.2 It was confirmed that Examiners would still receive paper copies of a thesis to examine and that it was the final sustained version of the thesis submitted to the library that would be submitted in an electronic format.
- 149.3 The Committee, for its part, approved the proposal with the recommendation that the electronic copy of the thesis be submitted and stored in a non-editable format. The Library, DIT and Registry will be working together to agree the best format for electronic submission and storage and amend the Regulations for the Preparation and Submission of Postgraduate Theses through the Information Systems Committee.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER ADMINISTRATION

150. It is assumed that the Committee will be aware that the administration of the external examining system has been increasingly hampered by its current paper-based nature. Transferring processes to a more effective and user-friendly web-based system offering improved functionality has been on the 'wish list' for some time. The necessary programming resource has now been identified and work will go forward during the spring term. Consultation with relevant members of school and college staff will be central to planning the system. It is not yet clear when all aspects of external examiner administration will be available on the web. However, the intention of both DIT and the Registry is that, at a minimum, external examiners' reports for academic year 2007/8 will be submitted and processed on the web in a format that should greatly reduce the consequent work for school and college staff. At an early stage, schools and colleges will be able to view information about externals in their areas on-line. In time, the entire process, from the nomination of externals to payment of their fees and expenses will be electronic rather than paper-based. Existing external examiners will be given the option of completing their period of appointment using the current paper-based system if they wish but it is expected that most, if not all, externals will welcome the introduction of the electronic format

UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

151. The Committee noted the updates on Curriculum Reform.
(copies filed as UCTL/040208/100a &b)

CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITY REPORT
9 MAY 2007 – 23 JANUARY 2008

152. The Committee noted the activity report from the Centre for Learning and Teaching.
(copy filed as UCTL/040208/101)

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

153. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Thursday 13 March 2008 in Committee Room 3.