UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2008

Present: Ms C Macaslan (Convener), Professor AJ Black, Professor G Burgess, Dr P Edwards, Ms A Fraser, Mr J Hardey, Ms A Harper, Mr D Hay, Professor WF Long, Dr GTA McEwan, Professor Salmon, Dr P Schlicke, Professor G Walkden and Dr MR Young, with Dr R Bernard, Ms K Christie, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms S Sithamparanathan, Ms P Spence and Ms A Hogg (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Dr B Connolly, Professor M A Cotter, Dr M J Hole, Mr D P Lessels, Mr D Paterson and Mrs L Stephen

MINUTES

154.   The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2008.
(copy filed as UCTL/130308/101)

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION: CURRICULUM REFORM

155.1   The Committee received the First Report of the Curriculum Commission.
(copy filed as UCTL/130308/102)

The Framework for Provision

155.2   The Committee were in agreement that due to the expansion of higher education, the range of abilities of entrants had widened and the University must embrace this change.   Members understood that the current challenge for the University was to ensure full social inclusion through a coherent framework.   Members reviewed the proposed framework for discussion; however questions were raised by the Committee as to the difference between this framework and that currently offered by the University.   The Convener confirmed that these provisions/practices do already exist within the University, however, within the proposed framework they have been refocused and repackaged.

155.3   It was noted that along with a greater recognition of successfully completed study and in order to accommodate breaks in study, the University is keen to promote flexible entry to and exit from points, depending on prior qualifications. The Convener informed the Committee that the general perception amongst members of the Commission was that many students currently felt 'demoted' when exiting from University with a certificate after one year or diploma after two years.   The Committee therefore agreed that institutional perception needs to change and a greater emphasis on promoting the flexibility of exiting and re-entering the University be given.

155.4   Further discussion amongst members centred on advanced entry students along with students transferring from College i.e. direct entrants.   Members agreed that despite direct entrants or advanced entry students satisfactorily meeting entry criteria these students unfortunately tend to struggle with the transition to University. The Committee agreed that the University therefore needs to be extremely careful about how these students are dealt with. The Committee agreed that an effective support infrastructure needs to be in place to ensure the successful transition of direct entrants and advanced entry students.

155.5   Another key discussion emerged regarding the employer perspective. The Committee agreed that this was key to the proposed framework. Employers need to be able to understand and recognise the qualifications offered by the University. The University therefore needs to move to a more flexible approach and ensure it caters for the needs of employers as well as the needs of the student in its provision of framework. Members agreed that employers are not only looking for qualifications but also key 'transferable' skills in graduates.

Graduate Attributes

155.6 The Committee agreed that the list of graduate attributes unique to the University of Aberdeen was an interesting one and it would be hard to argue against any of those currently listed. Some members argued that it was important to remember that the attributes need to be tested prior to implementation to ensure their suitability.

155.7 The Committee questioned whether the proposed attributes could be deliverable within a set curriculum, and if not could they then be gained outwith curricular activities, for example through non-curricular activities?

155.8 It was noted that the intensity of the Postgraduate Taught (PgT) programmes and members agreed that students registered on PgT programmes might mean that students registered on PgT programmes may not be able to address all attributes during their period of study at the University. Members therefore queried whether a separate list of attributes would be required/appropriate for PgT students.

155.9 The Committee suggested that PDP could be used as a tool in relation to the proposed graduates attributes.

Curriculum Content

155.10 The Convener briefed the Committee on the proposed curriculum content and confirmed that no proposals on the curriculum content of individual disciplines had been developed. This would be determined by individual disciplines.

155.11 After general discussion, members agreed that flexibility was essential in regards to curriculum content. The Committee agreed that students should continue to be exposed to material beyond their chosen disciplines and that that this should be enhanced. Members also agreed that it would be hard to pin point students to one particular route and therefore agreed that opportunities should be available to them to undertake a variety of study routes/options.

155.12 The Committee noted that a large proportion of students currently opt to tailor their degree to be discipline specific and, therefore, prefer to undertake only standard discipline courses. However, it was agreed that an equally large number of students prefer to undertake courses outwith their discipline area, in conjunction with their core courses, as it provides them with an opportunity to widen their perspective.

155.13 The Committee were intrigued by the proposal of New Aberdeen Courses and the proposed view that they would be 'designed to introduce, compare and apply to specific problems, the fundamental modes, concepts and perspectives of a number of disciplines'. Following discussion, the Committee agreed that these New Aberdeen Courses could possibly help produce better-informed discipline graduates with a wider and more critical understanding and therefore make our students more employable.

Supporting Curriculum Enhancement

155.14 The Committee were supportive of the various curriculum enhancement proposals including Scholarships, Induction, Student Support, Writing Skills and Timetable.

155.15 Although members agreed that Writing Skills was an important part of supporting curriculum enhancement, and should be an integral part of the curriculum, it was agreed that IT skills should be encompassed within this. As Information Technology plays a significant role within curriculum enhancement the Committee suggested it might be appropriate to rename this proposal as Communications Skills.

155.16 The Committee also agreed that the proposal of Scholarships, as part of supporting curriculum enhancement, was a good one. Members were keen to suggest that accommodation be included within this proposal as this *may* make the Scholarships more attractive and desirable to students. It was also requested that Scholarships include international and overseas students, in particular for Postgraduate Taught programmes.

155.17 Members were fully supportive of induction and agreed that this was an important part of supporting curriculum enhancement. The Committee agreed that the suggestion of developing partnerships with schools to ensure a smoother transition was an extremely positive one.

155.17 Further discussions also centred round the University timetable. However the Committee agreed that the timetable issue should be reviewed in more detail at a later date.

UPDATE FROM WORKING GROUP ON PASTORAL SUPPORT

156.1 Professor Long provided the Committee with an update from the Working Group on Pastoral Support. The Group were currently reviewing the support systems provided for students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) and to put forward recommendations for enhancements to the existing academic and pastoral support system. .

156.2 Professor Long informed the Committee that, initially, the Working Group have focussed primarily on the BSc and MA and, in particular, first year students.

156.3 The model being proposed by the Working Group will include the current academic advising system. This provides a named member of academic staff, ideally from the students' area of study, to whom the student is assigned for the duration of their studies. This system would fulfil one primary function:

- Provide both curricular and regulatory support for students.

156.4 The current academic advising system would continue to operate alongside a non-curricular role/system. Professor Long informed the Committee that the non-curricular role/system would fulfil two primary functions:

- Provide a source of non-academic support for students and would act as signposts, referring students on to appropriate services for further help and advice.
- Take a more proactive role in the induction and retention of students, holding a series of structured meetings with students throughout the year, both one-to-one and in small groups.

156.5 In developing this non-curricular role, Professor Long informed the Committee that the Working Group would give particular consideration to the line management, appointment, recognition and award of this role as well as appropriate training and guidance. The Committee also noted that the Group are intending to look at various workload models and a revision of the Adviser and Senior Adviser roles.

156.6 Professor Long also emphasised the Working Group's agreement to ensure that other aspects of support were provided to students. Students must be made more 'visible' and the Working Group had discussed various ways in which this could be developed e.g. through small group activities.

156.7 It is hoped that the proposed system will provide a sense of belonging and strong identification for the student and ensure they feel part of their School, which in turn will hopefully benefit Schools in terms of retention rates.

EXAMINERS' MEETINGS FOR JOINT AND COMBINED PROGRAMMES

157.1 The Committee received a paper on Examiners' meetings for joint and combined programmes.
(copy filed as UCTL/130308/103)

157.2 In considering the proposal, members agreed that institutionally the University was inconsistent in regards to Examiners' meetings.

157.3 Members agreed that the St Andrews example of having one Degree Classification Board was an interesting one; however, it was noted that Joint Examiners' Meetings were more of an issue for the Degree of MA than for the other Degrees. Members also approved of the 'Single Special Circumstances Board' currently operated at St Andrews University, where extenuating circumstances which are believed to have affected a student's performance are discussed. The Committee agreed that this would ensure consistency of practice across the University.

157.4 Members therefore agreed that the University should build on existing practice and proposed that a UCTL Working Group should be formed to review current policy and practice relating to Joint and Combined Examiners' Meetings t both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

POLICY ON STUDENT COMPLAINTS

158. The Committee approved amendments to the *Policy on Student Complaints* to ensure that the way in which the grounds for appeal to Court are detailed in the *Policy* are consistent with the way in which those contained in the *Policy on Academic Appeals* are detailed. It was proposed to amend the Policy as detailed below, additions in **bold** and deletions ~~scored through~~:

> 6. If a complaint is not upheld by a Vice-Principal or the University Secretary, then the complainant shall have the right of appeal to the University Court, but only on **limited grounds [Guidance Note 12]** ~~that the decision reached was procedurally irregular, perverse or otherwise unsound.~~

> 7. Where a complaint is upheld by a Vice-Principal or the University Secretary and is specifically against a member of staff or members of staff, the member(s) of staff concerned may also appeal to the University Court but only on **limited grounds [Guidance Note 12]** ~~that the decision reached was procedurally irregular, perverse or otherwise unsound~~.

APPROVAL OF PROGRAMME RESULTS

159. The Committee approved amendments to the Academic Quality Handbook and the Grade Spectrum to clarify procedures for determining degree results in the event of disagreements amongst examiners.

(copy filed as UCTL/130308/104)

RESEARCH ETHICS FRAMEWORK

160.1 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) the Committee approved the Research Ethics Framework and the Guidelines on Keeping of Research Records. The Framework and Guidelines were developed by the Joint Committee on Research Ethics and Governance as part of the Joint Committee's remit to develop policy and guidance on research governance and ethical issues.

160.2 The Committee noted that the Code of Practice for Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers would need to be amended to take the revised policies into account. The Committee agreed to forward this matter to the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) with a view to a revised version of the Code being in place for the start of 2008/2009.

(copy filed as UCTL/130308/105)

TERM DATES 2008-2009

161 The Committee approved amended term dates for students for the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) and students in programme year 4 of the Degree of Bachelor of Science Combined with Education:

Winter Term Opens	Thursday 28 August 2008
Winter Term Closes	Friday 19 December 2008
Spring Term Opens	Monday 5 January 2009
Spring Term Closes	Friday 3 April 2009
Summer Term Opens	Monday 20 April 2009
Summer Term Closes	Friday 19 June 2009

**LATEST DATE FOR THE RETURN OF EXAMINATION RESULTS
AUGUST 2008 DIET OF EXAMINATIONS**

162.   The Committee approved amendments to the latest date for the return of examination results in August 2008:

Level 1 to 4 and undergraduate Level 5 courses by Wednesday 3 September 2008 (previously 27 August)

Postgraduate taught courses and programmes by Friday 24 October 2008 (previously 17 October)

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

163.   The Committee noted that the following forthcoming Internal Teaching Reviews would take place this semester:

- School of Law, College of Arts & Social Sciences   30 April - 1 May 2008
- Graduate School, College of Life Sciences & Medicine   1 - 2 May 2008

SPARQS- 'SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONAL AGENDAS'

164.1   The Committee noted that the University was participating in the SPARQS' (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) pilot 'Supporting Individual Institutional agendas', where 5 days consultancy are given to institutions in the north of Scotland to develop the involvement of students in quality processes.

164.2   In consultation with the Students' Association, it had been agreed to focus on issues largely revolving around the desire to facilitate effective two-way feedback between staff and students but to do so through a school-level lens.

164.3   One School (or discipline area) from each College was invited to contribute based on our awareness from ITR and other work of their interest in student engagement. For 2007/08, Computing Science and the Schools of Biological Sciences and Social Science will participate. Work has already begun with Schools on an individual basis, to identify for each the key issues on which engagement is sought, and reflect upon how various tools and techniques might succeed in doing so.

164.4   A report on the key findings of the pilot would be brought to a future meeting of UCTL.

AMENDMENTS TO REGULATIONS

165.   Following the approval of the Omnibus Resolution at the meeting of UCTL on 4 February 2008, the Academic Standards Committees have approved further amendments to regulations. The Committee noted that these changes (as detailed below) had been incorporated within the version of the Omnibus Resolution which would be considered by the Court on Monday 17 March 2008 (amendments shown in **bold**):

Degrees of Bachelor Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

10(v)   Unless granted a concession by the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate), candidates must satisfy all requirements for the award of the degrees within six calendar years of the date of their first registration as candidates for the degrees**, excluding any period of registration for the final year of the Degree of Bachelor Science in Medical Science, or for another award, taken as an intercalating student.**

General Regulations for Taught Postgraduate Awards

4. The appropriate Postgraduate Officer may, on the recommendation of the relevant course organise, recognise as qualifying towards an award, or as exempting from part of the requirement for an award, attendance and/or qualifications gained before entry, providing that (a) candidates shall not be eligible for the award of any Postgraduate Certificate in the discipline of Education unless they have obtained a minimum of 30 credit points at level 5 obtained while registered for that award in the University of Aberdeen; **(b) candidates shall not be eligible for the award of the Postgraduate Certificate in Health Economics (by distance learning) unless they have attained a minimum of 45 credits at level 5 obtained while registered for that award in the University of Aberdeen; (c)** candidates shall not be eligible for the award of a Postgraduate Certificate in any other discipline, or any Postgraduate Diploma or Master's Degree, unless they have obtained a minimum of 60 credit points at level 5 obtained while registered for that award at the University of Aberdeen; **(d)** no more than 60 credit points at level 5 may be counted as common to the award of two different Master's degrees.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

166.   The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 14 May 2008 in Committee Room 2.