UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2009

Present: Professor WF Long (Convener), Professor M Cotter, Ms J Elliott, Dr D Hay, Mr D Lessels, Mr D McKay, Professor T Salmon, Professor G Walkden and Dr M Young with Ms K Christie, Mr N Edwards, Mr P Fantom, Ms A Hogg, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms P Spence, Dr R Bernard (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Professor A Black, Dr B Connolly, Dr P Edwards and Miss A Harper

MINUTES

205.   The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2008.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/14)

AMENDMENTS TO INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW PROCESSES

206.1   The Committee received a paper outlining the revisions to institutional Internal Teaching Review (ITR) documentation and processes in light of Scottish Funding Council (SFC) recommendations and comments from the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) (ASC(Pg)).

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/15)

206.2   The Convener briefed the Committee on the two main amendments to ITR processes including SFC Guidance on Institutional-led Quality Review and the Review of Postgraduate Provision.

206.3   The Committee noted various changes in the SFC guidance, in particular a greater use of external members from outside Scotland, and with international, expertise as well as increasing recognition of the role of support services in contributing to the quality of the student experience.

206.4   In relation to the Review of Postgraduate Provision the Convener briefed the Committee on discussions which had taken place at the meeting of Heads of School. These discussions focused primarily on the review of postgraduate provision and in particular ASC(Pg) proposals regarding future reviews of Graduate Schools. The Committee noted that there were differing opinions amongst members at this meeting and that in order for the matter to be discussed more fully, it was agreed that Heads of Graduate Schools would meet to consider their respective positions in this regard. The Committee agreed that that there should be a degree of flexibility in the operation of the review system and that the three Colleges did not necessarily all have to operate in the same way.

206.5   The Committee noted that the Schools of Social Science and Geosciences as well as Mathematics and Physics were conducting their ITR under existing ITR procedures, however as an interim measure these Schools were being asked to comment on the SFC's additional aspects not currently existing in ITR documentation, without too much formality or attention to fine detail, and with clear guidance on how best to do so.

206.6   The Committee approved the revised ITR documentation for immediate implementation.

CURRICULUM REFORM

207.1 The Convener briefed the Committee on the direct responsibilities of UCTL, as assigned to it by the Implementation Board of Curriculum Reform.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/16)

207.2 The Committee noted that UCTL had been assigned 14 Recommendations by the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board: for operational purposes these 14 Recommendations fall into two sets of seven (one set for Teaching and Learning and one set for ITR and programme reviews).

207.3 There was significant discussion of the various Curriculum Reform Recommendations and how these should be taken forward. The main points agreed are summarised as (figures in brackets refer to the numbered Recommendations of the Curriculum Commission):

- Undergraduate Personal Development Planning (4 & 33): these Recommendations should be devolved to the Centre of Learning and Teaching (CLT) and the Careers Service to be taken forward with UCTL receiving a progress report at its meeting in March.

- Entry qualifications/entrance exams (10 & 11): to be taken forward by the Academic Administration sub-group of the Implementation Board with UCTL receiving a progress report at its meeting in March.

- Statement of Rights and Responsibilities (29): the Committee noted that it was proposed that material would be brought to the March meeting for consideration.

- Feedback Framework (30) would be taken forward by CLT with a progress report being provided at the March meeting of UCTL.

- Strategy to identify and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching (36) would be taken forward by CLT with a progress report being provided at the March meeting of UCTL.

- Course and programme review (6, 30, 34, 40, 41, 44) were currently under consideration by the Registry. Discussions were under way regarding amendments to the SENAS process and with DIT regarding the possibility of technological assistance with the process.

- Amendments to the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process (7): the Committee agreed that it would not be appropriate to begin consideration of this until the implementation process was further on.

207.4 The Committee agreed that the explicit information regarding the timeline/timescale for course and programme review should be provided by the Implementation Board. The Committee further requested that a recommendation be made to the Implementation Board for clear guidance on who sits on each of the Boards as it would help to see where areas are interlinked.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

208.1 The Convener briefed the Committee on the forthcoming Enhancement-led Institutional Review, which is due to take place during session 2009/2010.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/17)

208.2 The Committee noted that a small planning group had been established including the College Directors of Learning and Teaching, Graduate School representation together with representation from the Centre for Learning and Teaching and the Registry. The Committee also noted that the review requires the University to submit a 'Reflective Analysis' in advance of the ELIR visit.

208.3 The Committee further noted several of the main points outlined in the revised ELIR methodology, including a more explicit focus on collaborative activity, an increased focus on international dimensions/perspectives of international students studying on campus as well as the increased focus on the 'effectiveness of student engagement and engagement in the provision of feedback'.

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

209.1 The Committee received a paper detailing initial draft revisions to the Academic Quality Handbook, Section 10, *Collaborative agreements, and flexible and distributed learning: quality assurance procedures.*

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/18)

209.2 The Committee noted that although the previous arrangements have served the University well, it was agreed that they are in need of revision and amendment. The Committee noted that the revised documentation now includes, for the first time, appropriate guidance regarding the establishment of joint degrees. Additionally, clear guidance regarding institutional decisions had been incorporated and the guidance had been amended to reflect the development in QAA thinking from process-based arrangements to those which are outcome-based.

209.3 Members agreed that the University must be clear about the types of agreement which the institution is prepared to enter into when considering collaborative provision. It was also agreed that the University should ensure that it continues to manage these processes effectively.

209.4 The Committee requested that more explicit guidance be given in relation to what determines a collaborative agreement e.g. queries were raised by members regarding ERASMUS and whether this came under the umbrella of collaborative arrangements. The Committee also agreed that flow diagrams of the various processes/stages of approval would be helpful to be incorporated in the further revised version. Members also agreed that more detail could also be taken out of the main body of the document and included in the appendices section.

ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE

210.1 The Committee noted the Annual Report to Senate for 2007/2008.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/19)

210.2 The Convener briefed the Committee on the various areas outlined in the Annual Report as follows:

Student Progression
There was a notable decrease in the number of students discontinued by the Students' Progress Committee and this reflects the change in approach adopted by the SPC. The SPC is more supportive and now seeks ways to reconstruct student's studies.

Academic Appeals

Although there was a significant increase in the number of undergraduate appeals received, far fewer of these were upheld by the Head of School/Examiners. Coincidently there was a decrease in the number of cases at postgraduate level with around half of those submitted found to be not competent.

Academic Discipline

The increasing trend noted in previous years continues, although there has been a decrease in the number of cases of plagiarism. However the figures are distorted by two cases of collusion, one of which involved 47 students and the other which involved 12 students.

Academic Complaints

The number of academic complaints rose slightly compared to that of the previous year. These complaints are increasingly more complex and therefore taking longer to resolve.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Trends identified in previous years continue however because the numbers involved are so small it is difficult to draw any significant conclusions from the data.

210.3   The Committee further noted that in future Fitness to Practice cases would be detailed within the Annual Report. It was agreed that specific details on appeals and complaints i.e. what they involve, should be included in future reporting. Members agreed that this would help identify areas for concern/ of bad practice.

REVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

211.1   The Committee received a paper on the progress of the review of the University's Committee structure, which invited the Committee to reflect on its operation within the structure and its primary role.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/20)

211.2   Members noted there was now an increased emphasis on postgraduate provision within the Committee. This was emphasised by the invitation several years ago for the Heads of Graduate Schools to join the Committee.

211.3   Following this the Committee agreed that it was good practice to be able to review policies and practices for both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching/provision in the same area.

211.4   In addition, the Committee were very much of the opinion that the current Committee (UCTL) operates effectively in its current position in the overall committee structure. Members agreed that the Committee is able to take an institutional perspective on learning and teaching matters, and ensure that appropriate external policy and information is considered.

211.5   The Committee also agreed that there was appropriate interaction with other committees as necessary (e.g. Academic Standards Committees, College Learning and Teaching Committees etc).

DEGREE OF MASTER IN SCIENCE

212.   The Committee approved, and agreed to forward to Senate, the draft Resolution 'Regulations for the Degree of Master in Science (MSci)' to enable the University to be able to offer an integrated undergraduate Master's degree for students taking degrees which include an industrial placement.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/21)

OMNIBUS RESOLUTION

213. The Committee approved, and agreed to forward to Senate, 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 2008 which have not been the subject of separate resolutions.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/22)

PROFESSIONAL GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN EDUCATION

214. The Committee approved, and agreed to forward to Senate, changes to the Regulations for the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE).

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/23)

GRADUATION DATES

215. The Committee approved the dates and allocations of students for the July 2009 Graduation Ceremonies.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/24)

REVISIONS TO SECTION 5 (ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT COMPLAINTS ON ACADEMIC MATTERS) OF THE QAA CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

216. The Committee approved the minor revisions which are being proposed to the University's appeals and complaints processes to take account of the changes contained in the revised version of Section 5 of the QAA Code of Practice.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/25)

UPDATE ON POINTS BASED IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

217. The Committee noted the following update on the main points occurring since the meeting of UCTL in November, relating to the move to a Points Based Immigration System:

- The application for the University to be on the UKBA Sponsors Register was submitted on Friday 23 January.
- A parliamentary rule means that the UKBA does not have to release guidance until 3 weeks before new legislation is implemented. Although the UKBA is posting details of its requirements to go into an offer letter on its website it is saying to HEIs that the rules are work in progress (http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk/applyingafter-March/factsheets/samplevisaletter/)
Applicants due to commence study after March, however, are already reading this site and emailing to ask questions. Through Universities UK some HEIs are opposing some of the requirements and comments were due back to UUK by 26 January. The most bizarre request is that they want to see paper receipts of any advanced payments by applicants, and they will not accept electronic copies!
- No further guidance has been released on the reporting side of the new system. The UKBA will be concentrating its efforts on the admissions side of things before releasing any information on the reporting side.
- A full meeting of the internal Working Group, chaired by Steve Cannon, took place on 17 December. Another meeting is to be scheduled for February.

- Weekly meetings are ongoing with DIT (SRAS and Registry staff) to discuss expected changes required to the Admissions system gateways and to the Student Record, up to the point of registration.
- Jenny Fernandes and Yvonne Gordon are still presenting their session to raise awareness on the new system (to the Management Team in November, College of Physical Sciences in January; and UMG at the end of February).
- SRAS is preparing guidance notes for international students on the new system, which will be posted on the SRAS website.

REVIEW OF TURNITIN PLAGIARISM DETECTION SERVICE

218.   The Committee noted the review of Turnitin, to be undertaken by the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

(copy filed as UCTL/040209/26)

HIGHER QUALITY: BULLETIN FROM THE QAA

219.   The Committee noted the most recent edition (November 2008) of 'Higher Quality', the bulletin of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, which is available at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/news/higherquality/default.asp

UCTL WORKING GROUPS

220.   The Committee noted that the two UCTL Working Groups, on the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum and Examiners' Meetings for Joint Degrees, both met for the first time in December. It is anticipated that both groups will report to UCTL in March.