

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING  
(26 October 2011)

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING**

**Minute of the extraordinary meeting held on 31 August 2011**

*Present:* Professor P McGeorge (Convener), Ms J Batty, Ms J Bjorkqvist, Dr B Connolly, Dr S Davies, Mr P Fantom, Mr B Lockhart, Professor W Long, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr J Morrison, Dr K Shennan, Dr R Bernard (Clerk) *In attendance:* Dr D Comber, Ms E Hay (Minute Secretary) Ms J Pearson

*Apologies:* Ms T Birley, Professor P Edwards, Dr P Murray, Professor W Naphy, Ms P Spence, Dr R Wells

407.1 The Convener opened the meeting and thanked members for attending the extraordinary meeting of the UCTL.

**REVIEW OF EXTERNAL EXAMINING ARRANGEMENTS IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES IN THE UK**

408.1 The Committee was invited to comment on the QAA paper, '*Review of External Examining Arrangements in Universities and Colleges in the UK*'. The Committee was informed that comments should be on the wording of the document only.

*(copy filed as UCTL/310811/001)*

408.2 The Committee noted the following points:

- With reference to Expectation 5(e) (vii) the Committee noted the importance of defining a 'member of staff'.
- The Committee highlighted a contradiction between Expectations 9 and 11 and raised the issue that use of the word 'agree' in Expectation 11 may not be appropriate.
- Referring to Expectation 5(h), the Committee noted the importance of defining terminology as not all institutions function with departments.
- The Committee commented that Expectation 5 (d) which limits externals to 2 appointments may be difficult in some cases.
- The Committee recognised the importance of making clear to externals what Good Practice is.
- Members of the Committee raised the issue of payment of externals, commenting that to attract the best we may need to pay out more.

*Action: Clerk to feed comments back to the QAA*

**RE-SIT EXAMINATION ATTEMPTS**

409.1 The Committee was invited to consider a proposal to revise the number of re-sit examination attempts students are entitled to from 2 to 1.

*(copy filed as UCTL/310811/002)*

409.2 It was noted that currently, the University allows Undergraduate students who fail a first attempt at an examination to 2 further opportunities to take the examination. The Committee was asked to consider the proposal that this be changed to 1 re-sit and students who fail to achieve a pass would be required to take the course in its entirety again. The Committee agreed that taking a course again is often the academically sound option for the student and

taking re-sits can often give false hope. The Committee noted that the majority of other institutions only allow one re-sit attempt. The Committee were informed that approximately 200-300 Undergraduate students could be affected by this change.

- 409.3 Members of the Committee raised the issue of those students with a Medical Certificate (MC) or Good Cause (GC) for an examination. The Committee agreed that those in this situation should be entitled to take a first attempt at the exam at the next available opportunity and be entitled to 1 further re-sit if required. The Committee noted, however, that despite a valid MC or GC, the best option is not always to take a re-sit. The Committee recognised that a student who has not attended enough of a course, despite an MC or GC, should receive a C7 (withdrawal of class certificate).
- 409.4 The Committee noted that the proposal suggested the 1 re-sit opportunity for students should be provided in August. Members suggested that current flexibility, allowing students the choice of when to take a re-sit, should be maintained. The Committee noted August is not always an appropriate time of year for students and many members of staff are also often away from the University. The Committee were reassured by the Convenor that high levels of support for students would be provided alongside any change to restrict the number of re-sits, including ensuring staff were accessible. The Committee agreed that students registering for an examination but not turning up would count as an attempt. The Committee recognised the impact on progression a change to re-sit opportunities may have. Members agreed that it would be reasonable to allow students to carry only one course when progressing.
- 409.5 The Committee acknowledged that retaking a course can mean different things across the University. In recognition of this, the Committee agreed that while some things would be at the discretion of Course Coordinators, clear rules would need to be defined. As many students in this position are already struggling, clear guidance and support should be provided. Members of the Committee raised the issue of capping re-sit results, acknowledging that the majority of Institutions do cap.
- 409.6 The Committee recognised the proposed changes would allow for the opportunity to look at re-sit options for Postgraduate Taught students. The Committee agreed that the paper should now go to Heads of School for discussion. The Convenor asked the Committee to discuss the issue with Colleagues.

*Action: to go to the next meeting of the Heads of School*

## **OFF-CAMPUS EXAMINATIONS**

- 410.1 The Committee was invited to discuss off-campus examinations and whether or not a change to University policy should be considered, specifically in recognition of UKBA requirements.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/310811/003)*
- 410.2 The Committee noted off-campus examinations currently require the permission of the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching. Before permission is given, reasons for the request are taken into consideration and advice is sought from the School or College concerned. The Committee noted that requests for off-campus examinations are becoming increasingly common in light of UKBA requirements. The Committee recognised the need to revisit the current policy.
- 410.3 The Committee were informed that the University of Glasgow routinely allows students to take examinations off-campus and charges them to do so. The Committee agreed that examinations could only be taken in approved venues, overseen by an appropriate body and with the appropriate provisions in place. The Committee recognised students from within the UK may also make requests for off-campus exams, specifically in recognition of the cost of getting to Aberdeen outwith term time. The Committee acknowledged that given the RUK fees issue this must be taken into consideration. The Committee noted that the criteria currently used for determining whether or not a student should be permitted to take an exam off-campus examination needs to be broadened. A straightforward process would be required.

- 410.4 The Committee recognised that it would not be possible to take some examinations off-campus. Although a fee is not currently charged, this would need to be looked at. The Committee agreed to raise the issue at a meeting of the Heads of School.

*Action: to go to the next meeting of the Heads of School*

### **MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES**

- 411.1 The Committee considered the issue of mitigating circumstances and noted its importance. The Committee acknowledged the increasing need for transparency in the way mitigating circumstances are recorded. Members of the Committee noted the difficulty of obtaining medical certificates and the need to educate students on what mitigating circumstances are.

*(copy filed as UCTL/310811/004)*

- 411.2 The Committee considered the proposed form and noted the importance of ensuring students completing the form are clear it won't automatically be accepted. The Committee agreed that while the proposed form should not detract from Academic judgement, a more focused approach is required. The Committee acknowledged the importance of transparency across the University as different outcomes across different Schools or Colleges can often be confusing for students. The Committee acknowledged that the good practice for Schools is to have knowledge of students with mitigating circumstances in advance of Examiners' meetings

- 411.3 The Committee recognised some students may not want to detail their personal circumstances on paper. The Committee agreed there would always be exceptional circumstances and members of the Committee suggested that an option to speak with a member of staff could be included on the form. It was suggested that a leaflet, such as that used in the appeals and complaints process, could be published for students advising them of the process.

- 411.4 The Committee noted that the proposal would be for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students. It was agreed that the proposal should be discussed at the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees.

*Action: to go to the next meeting of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees*

### **REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES**

- 412.1 Professor Long presented to the Committee an oral report on the Review of Institutional Quality Assurance Processes. Professor Long informed the Committee of the proposed changes in recognition of the ELIR review and the ongoing implementation of CREF, highlighting Quality Assurance in taught provision and the importance of the monitoring of modules, programmes and Internal Teaching Review (ITR).

- 412.2 The Committee acknowledged a focus of the proposals would be on programme monitoring, an issue highlighted during the last ELIR. Professor Long informed the Committee that one of the proposals would be to introduce the annual monitoring of programmes in Schools and to devolve course evaluation back to Schools, allowing for the opportunity for Quality Enhancement at course level. The Committee also considered proposed changes to ITR, cutting down the paperwork required for the current process and making more user and provider friendly.

- 412.3 The Committee agreed that fundamental change could be implemented from further discussion of the proposals and agreed that the issue should be discussed at the next meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee. The Committee noted that a sub-group of UCTL should be formed to look at the proposals in further detail.

*Action: to go to the next meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee*

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 413.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held as follows:  
Wednesday 26 October 2011 at 2 p.m.