

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2013**

*Present:* Dr R Wells (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Miss J Bjorkvist, Mrs J Bruce, Dr P Davidson, Dr S Davies, Dr A Jenkinson, Professor A Lumsden, Dr J McDonald, Dr G McEwan, Professor P McGeorge, Dr R Millar, Dr R Patey, Dr R Vij, Miss E Webb (Clerk)

*Apologies:* Mr D Auchie, Ms C Baverstock, Ms K Christie, Miss Dunn, Professor R Evans-Jones, Mr P Fantom, Dr A Hartley, Dr M Law, Dr W D McCausland, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr J Perkins, Dr D Wood

**MINUTES**

*(Copy filed as UG/270313/001)*

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 7 December 2012.

**CLASS REPRESENTATIVES – A CODE OF PRACTICE**

*(Copy filed as UG/270313/002)*

- 2.1 The Committee were informed that the purpose of the paper was to streamline the system within the Schools, and to continue to improve training and development and to discuss movement of SCEF's to allow better use of the Student Staff Liaison Committees.
- 2.2 The Committee raised concerns about students being representatives for classes that they do not attend. However it was discussed that this may be beneficial as it would encourage the representatives to take an active role, and any view they delivered would not be biased by their own experiences.
- 2.3 The Committee noted its concern about moving the timing of SCEF's. The Committee were informed that the Student Association were aware of examples of best practice in place, and would operate flexibility in their discussions on the movement of SCEF's, taking best practice into consideration.
- 2.4 The Committee were satisfied from a quality assurance perspective that the proposed pilot should go ahead. The Committee asked that the Students Association liaise with Schools regarding timing of SCEFS and SSLC, and that they should take into consideration the impact of the change to the Academic Year. The Committee look forward to being updated on the pilot next year.
- 2.5 It was raised that there was a lack of information regarding the time and date of SSLC and it was suggested that these meetings should be advertised well in advance.

**Action: Clerk**

#### **Clerks Note:**

**The School Administrative Officers have been emailed, copied to the School Directors of Teaching asking them to arrange the Student Staff Liaison Committee meetings in advance with invites being sent out in a timely fashion. Additionally, it was asked if information could be published in Course Handbooks and posted on MyAberdeen at the start of each session.**

**Positive responses have already been received from the School's, confirming action will be taken. It has been noted that the summer months are utilised for School Administrative planning and updating of all materials including Committee Scheduling, and that updated information will not be available until later in the summer, and once the teaching timetable has been confirmed.**

#### **Cheating in Examinations**

*(Oral Item)*

- 3.1 The Committee discussed the difficulty of providing a solution to the problem of cheating in examinations, especially when little can be done unless the student is caught in the act of cheating.
- 3.2 The Committee agreed that the University did have sufficient rules in place; however there appeared to be a lack of enforcement of the rules. It was noted that the rules must be enforced and students made aware of what constitutes cheating.
- 3.4 It was suggested that posters reiterating the rules were placed in venues including the toilets, that students who leave the exam hall have their paper marked by an invigilator with the time they left and returned and possibly that toilets are checked by porters and invigilators for offending items.
- 3.5 The Committee asked that more clocks be placed in exam halls to prevent students asking to use their mobile phones as a time keeping device.

**Action: Clerk**

#### **Clerks Note:**

**Estates were emailed bringing the issue to their attention and provided the following information;**

**“Within Estates we have been looking at the provision of clocks in all central timetabled rooms with a capacity in excess of 20 students. We have acquired a supply of clocks and are currently in the process of drawing up a list of rooms where these clocks will be affixed to the wall at a height where they will be visible to all in the room. This will cover all of the smaller examination venues.**

**In recent examination diets we have been providing more than one clock in the larger venues.**

**I would say that in the past the problem was having suitable points to affix the temporary clocks but this problem will be overcome by our planned course of action.**

**Hopefully everything will be in place for the resit diet in August.”**

**Specifically, a large clock was placed in Elphinstone Hall at the front of the Hall in May, with a second clock being placed on a music stand at the fire break.**

**Estates have asked that if there are any particular problem areas that we bring these to their attention.**

## **PROCESS FOR REDACTING DEFAMATORY COMMENTS FROM SCEF**

*(Oral Item)*

- 4.1 The Committee were informed that following communication with UCU, the University has been asked to discuss how they would tackle defamatory comments on SCEF forms, and how these comments should be dealt with.
- 4.2 The Committee identified two types of defamatory comments; those that are covered by legislation and those comments made that may provide a contribution to education development, but are not construed articulately, sometimes causing offence.
- 4.3 The Committee first raised and discussed the issue of anonymity. Currently, it is a student's perception that the electronic SCEF forms are anonymous. However, it was confirmed that ultimately IT could provide a trace. It was agreed that any action that was taken that would result in a student being identified, means that students must be made aware that SCEF forms can be traced.
- 4.4 It was discussed that if defamatory comments were made and the University decides to take action, consideration must be given to how the situation is dealt with. This has particular implications with regards to fitness to practice requirements for staff and students related to Medical/Health Care and trainee teachers.
- 4.5 The Committee agreed that students should be educated as to the purpose and value of a SCEF form, and this should include an explanation on the types of comment that are not acceptable.
- 4.6 The Committee suggested that students who submitted defamatory comments received a warning on first offence, with formal action under the Code of Practice on Student Discipline being taken on second offence. The Committee discussed that it would be likely that a strongly worded warning on first offence to include phrases such as "fitness to practice" and "legislation" would prevent a second offence.
- 4.7 With regards to redacting defamatory comments from SCEF forms, there was mixed opinion on the matter. It was agreed that comments that would be a breach of law under legislation should clearly be dealt with, however when dealing with other comments the Committee found that it would be more difficult to tackle. It was felt that the University has a duty to protect junior members of staff from upsetting and distressing comments, which can have a negative impact on how that person continues to develop as an employee; however the Committee agreed that negative comments are to be expected since each individual has their right to an opinion.

- 4.8 The Committee urged that caution should be used when looking at which body would make the decision on removing comments to ensure that the SCEF's were still an accurate reflection of opinion which allowed the teaching to be developed.

**Any Other Business**

- 5.1 The Committee were informed that the Student Association wished to discuss paperless essays. Printing has an environmental impact and it is suggested that the possibility of electronically returning essays is discussed.

**Action: AUSA**

**Clerks Note:**

**A paper is being presented to the College Teaching and Learning Committee's by AUSA.**

