

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2008

Present: Lady Catto (Convener), Mr S Cannon, Mr G Cox, Mr SV Duggan, Mr N Edwards, Ms J Elliott, Mr L Forsyth, Mr G Hunter, Mr J Keating, Mr A Kerr, Professor WF Long, Mr D McKay, Mr S McKinnon, Mr RW Murray, Mr M Seed and Ms YS Gordon (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor GJA Burgess and Ms C Macaslan

31. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2008 were approved.
(copy filed as SAC/101108/07)

32. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Administration of the Students' Association (Minute 2.1 refers)

32.1 With regard to the administration of the Students' Association coming under the University's remit, the following was noted:

- that the proposal had been ratified at the Student Council in October;
- that a first draft of a service-level agreement was in preparation;
- that a Human Resources Officer was preparing a timeline for handover;
- that the President of the SA was in consultation with NUS (Scotland) over the proposed change to the administration.

Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (Minute 6.2 refers)

32.2 The SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) reported that she is striving to introduce a formal structure for Teaching Assistants/Demonstrators and to have this activity recognised as part of educational development, like the Aspire programme. In consultation with the Graduate Schools she is trying to establish how this type of activity fits into the overall learning structure, if it is encouraged or discouraged. The Secretary to the University also advised that this proposal be taken forward by the SA to the Staffing and Development Committee.

32.3 It was agreed that a more formal report on the progress of this proposal be prepared for the next meeting of the Committee.

Action: JE

33. University Committee Structure

33.1 The Committee received a paper from the Operating Board (formerly JPFEC) requesting that all committees reflect on their responsibilities and whether these responsibilities were best discharged by a formal standing committee; reporting routes; and the relationships and overlaps between University committees. The Committee was also invited to consider its primary role, either governance, strategic or functional.

(copy filed as SAC/101108/08)

33.2 The following main points arose from the discussion:

- the Committee agreed that the Committee should retain its function – the Students' Association meeting formally with the University to raise issues – even though the most productive work was undertaken outside of this forum in smaller groups;
- that it was useful to hear about issues that were of concern to the students, for example ELIR and student social space;
- that joint strategies between the SA and University could be considered, for example transport for students could be dealt with jointly rather than a member of the SA dealing himself and reporting back to the Committee;
- the Committee agreed that items requiring debate should be encouraged.

33.3 The Committee's main role was functional but with an aim to be more strategic. The reporting route was correct.

Action: Clerk

34. Student Accommodation

34.1 The Committee considered an extract from the Register of Strategic Risks concerning the possible bad press to the University if there was a student accommodation crisis. The Committee was required to report comments back to the University's Risk Committee.

(copy filed as SAC/101108/09)

34.2 It was reported that the lessons learnt in 2007 led to a speedy and smooth operation when applied in 2008. Within two weeks all students were housed. It had been difficult to predict as usual, for example 459 applications had been received from international students and only 159 were now in University accommodation. Ten students remained in King's Hall but were being moved shortly. King's Hall was expected to be used during the January intake. In 2008/09 there had been an additional 750 bed spaces compared with 2007/08.

34.3 The SA Vice-President (Welfare & Equal Opportunities) reported that the focus was mainly on first-year students but that returning students also struggled to find accommodation. The SA database on available housing was therefore crucial.

34.4 With regard to strategic risk, the quality and scale of accommodation could be an issue but that no crisis was expected due to the extra bed spaces in 2009/10.

Action: Clerk

34.5 The Director of Campus Services agreed that in the future Campus Services and Student Recruitment & Admissions would work more closely together to try to avoid housing students in hotel accommodation at the start of term; and that he would consider the possibility of overseas students arriving a week earlier than moving-in weekend, housing the students elsewhere initially until the proper moving-in time.

Action: LF

35. Students' Association

Pre-Term Student Communication

35.1 The SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) reported that the students would like there to be more information available in advance of arrival regarding, for example, course choices and study abroad.

- 35.2 It was noted that an induction group with membership from Student Recruitment, Registry, Student Support Services and the Students' Association were tasked to co-ordinate induction across the University, most of the induction information being available on the University's New Students' website. There was also an Associate Student (pre-entry) scheme piloted in the summer of 2008 which introduced students to the campus early and those who wished to do so could meet with their Adviser of Studies to discuss course choices in advance of main registration. It was also noted that the Lonely Planet Guide would carry an entry for applicants about the University.

Class Representatives

- 35.3 The Committee received an oral report from the SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) regarding the current Class Representative system. It was reported that 300 representatives had been trained this year and that this had highlighted a need for a more strategic and robust system to be established.
- 35.4 It was agreed that the Vice-President (Education & Employability) would investigate how the Universities across Scotland operated their Class Representative system and the outcome of the investigation would be reported to the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL). The Clerk would highlight the issue to the Senate.

Action: JE/Clerk

[Note by Clerk: A report on the Class Representative system was also considered by the UCTL on 5 November 2008.]

Timetabling

- 35.5 The Committee received an oral report from the SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) regarding the students' position on the current room booking system. The students felt that the current system required review and that rooms should be evaluated for their purpose.
- 35.6 The Secretary to the University reported that a full year-long review was undertaken on the timetabling system about five years ago and the decision was made at the time that the *status quo* should be maintained by the Senate.
- 35.7 The Committee noted the students' position, highlighting that a review of the timetabling system would be a matter for consideration under curriculum reform. The Clerk would highlight the issue to the Senate.

Action: Clerk

Departmental Societies

- 35.8 The SA Vice-President (Societies & Student Activities) reported that he would like to encourage departments to set up societies for their area of studies, as these societies had proved to be valuable in areas where they had already been established. For example, holding pub quizzes, inviting lecturers from other universities to speak at organised events.
- 35.9 The Clerk agreed to pass this request on to the administrator responsible for organising the Heads of School meetings.

Action: Clerk

International Students and their educational background

- 35.10 It was agreed that the Director of Student Support Services and the SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) meet to discuss how to improve the University's score on the overseas student barometer, perhaps by gathering a representative group of students together to discuss their needs.

Action: SVD & JE

36. Reports

36.1 The Committee noted the following reports:

- (a) Students' Association
- (b) Campus Services

(copy filed as SAC/101108/10)

(copy filed as SAC/101108/11)

37. Dates of future meetings

37.1 The Committee noted that future meetings would be held as follows:

Monday 23 February 2009 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2

Monday 18 May 2009 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2 – **please note new date**