

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2009

Present: Lady Catto (Convener), Professor GJA Burgess, Mr S Cannon, Mr N Edwards, Ms J Elliott, Mr G Hunter, Mr J Keating, Professor WF Long, Mr D McKay, Mr S McKinnon with Mrs J Chalmers, Mr SV Duggan, Ms C Duncan, Mr L Forsyth, Mr RW Murray, Mr I O'Neal, Mr R Parker, Ms K Ross, Mr M Seed, Mr J Simpson and Ms C Brooks and Ms YS Gordon (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G Cox and Mr A Kerr

46. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2009 were approved.
(copy filed as SAC/180509/16)

47. Matters arising from the Minutes

Administration of the Students' Association (Minute 39.1 refers)

47.1 The President of the Students' Association (SA) reported that there had been no onward progress with the transfer of the administration of the SA to the University's umbrella as the issues regarding pensions and VAT liability were still to be resolved.

47.2 The Convener hoped that a resolution could be found to these issues and an update reported back to the next meeting of the Committee.

Wednesday Afternoons (Minute 40.2 refers)

47.3 The Clerk reported that she and the SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) had yet to meet to discuss the content of the request to go forward to the Senate Business Committee.

47.4 It was noted that policy was already in place to keep Wednesday afternoons free for sport and that action to reinforce and reaffirm existing policy to the Senate Business Committee was required. The original policy had been aimed at undergraduate students and it was noted that any recommendation going forward to the Business Committee would now include taught postgraduate students as well as other accepted absences (not just sport).

47.5 The SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) reported that leaflets were being prepared by the SA to raise awareness of the policy among staff.

47.6 The Convener hoped that the matter would be resolved before the beginning of the new Academic Year.

Action: Clerk

Student Senate Composition (Minute 40.3 refers)

47.7 To note: That the proposal to increase the volume of student Senators had still to go forward to the Senate.

Transport (update) (Minute 40.11 refers)

- 47.8 The SA Vice-President (Welfare & Equal Opportunities) reported that he had written to First Group regarding improvements to the No. 20 bus services as well as pricing and access for students in general.
- 47.9 The SA Vice-President (Welfare & Equal Opportunities) also reported First Group had decided to suspend the No. 20 bus service from July 2009-September 2009. The SA Vice-President reported that he was currently gathering data on the demand for the No. 20 Service during the summer vacation period and that he was in contact with Aberdeen City Council regarding the possible provision of an alternative Service.
- 47.10 The University Secretary reported that he had written to First Group requesting the opportunity to discuss their decision but had yet to receive a response. He noted that a commercial solution may have to be agreed with First Group.
- 47.11 The Committee noted the inconvenience of the loss of the No. 20 bus service over the summer vacation period and also the possible safety implications for students and staff that may arise from the loss of the service.

48. Students' Association

Postgraduate Teaching Assistants

- 48.1 The Committee received a paper, which was tabled, on current practices in Schools with regard to training, pay and working conditions.
(copy filed as SAC/180509/17)
- 48.2 The SA Vice-President (Education & Employability) reported that the paper drew upon a number of sources to identify best practice in the work, training and development of postgraduate teaching assistants and that the SA would urge the University to implement a consistent policy on best practice developed across all Schools.
- 48.3 It was agreed that as the Report's submission to the Committee had been delayed it would not be actioned by the Committee at the meeting but noted for information.
- 48.4 It was agreed that the report should be passed to the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL) to take forward.

Action: WFL

Class Representatives (SA Policy for best practice)

- 48.5 The Committee considered a draft policy on the Class Representative system.
(copy filed as SAC/180509/18)
- 48.6 The SA Vice-President (Education and Employability) urged the University to develop a School, or ideally, a University policy on best practice and guidance for Class Representatives.
- 48.7 It was noted that the draft policy was to be considered by the University Committee for Teaching and Learning on 20 May 2009.

Timetabling (SA Policy for best practice)

- 48.8 The Committee considered a draft policy on timetabling.
(copy filed as SAC/180509/19)

48.9 The SA Vice-President (Education and Employability) reported that the SA had developed a number of broad statements from the issues raised by students with regard to timetabling particularly the access to Student Support Services available to students who were in classes all day.

48.10 The Committee noted that the draft policy was to be considered by the Curriculum Reform Timetabling Implementation Group on 21 May 2009.

Feedback and Assessment (SA Policy for best practice)

48.11 The Committee considered a draft policy on assessment, marking and feedback.
(copy filed as SAC/180509/20)

48.12 It was noted that principles raised in the draft policy were to be considered by the UCTL on 20 May 2009.

48.13 The Convener of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) urged that principles as they apply to taught postgraduate students as well as to undergraduates should also be considered.

Information and Advice Centre Leaflets

48.14 The SA Vice-President (Welfare & Equal Opportunities) reported that a rebranding of the SA Information and Advice Centre was underway and to be completed by end of July 2009. The rebranding would identify six key areas of student life and produce sets of information related to the six key areas.

49. International Students

49.1 The Committee considered a report from the Director of Student Support Services on the student experience of international students.

(copy filed as SAC/180509/21)

49.2 The Director of Student Support Services reported that front line service staff had met with international students to identify the needs of international students.

49.3 The Committee noted that meetings have also taken place between international students and the University Secretary on non-academic issues and with the Convener of the UCTL on academic issues.

49.4 The Committee noted that the meetings held had identified differing and diverse needs within the international student population and that issues identified by international students were often not peculiar to international students but applied to the student body as a whole.

49.5 The Committee agreed that while small changes could be implemented in the short term the University must consider longer term solutions and identify the resources necessary to put these changes in place.

49.6 The Director of Student Support Services reported that a Student Experience Coordinator was to be appointed by the University, based in the Registry.

49.7 The University Secretary suggested that consideration be given to appointing a Sabbatical International Officer within the SA.

49.8 The Committee noted the International Student Officers had to commit more time and resources to issues arising from the introduction of the points based immigration system. The Director of Student Support Services reported that an additional staff member had been appointed to assist with the additional work load.

50. Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Staff

50.1 The Committee considered a draft statement of Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Staff.

(copy filed as SAC/180509/22)

50.2 The Committee noted the concerns of the SA following a meeting by Heads of School that the staff side of the Draft Statement of Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Staff was being diluted. The SA expressed further concerns that the document was becoming a statement of student rather than staff responsibilities and was no longer the partnership agreement that had originally been envisioned.

50.3 The Convenor of the UCTL noted that the Draft Statement was to go to the UCTL on 20 May 2009 and would re-consider the SA's concerns and examine parts of the Draft Statement that had been removed during the Heads of School discussion.

50.4 The Committee noted that the SA envisioned the final Statement of Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Staff to be an ethos for study at the University of Aberdeen but not a binding document.

51. Work of the SA Sabbatical Officers

The University Secretary praised the work of the outgoing Students' Association Sabbatical Officers during their year in office.

52. Reports

52.1 The Committee noted the following reports:

- a) Students' Association *(copy filed as SAC/180509/23)*
- b) Campus Services *(copy filed as SAC/180509/24)*
- c) Composite report from the Academic Registrar, the Directors of Student Support Services, Centre for Learning and Teaching, and the Head of the Careers Service.

(copy filed as SAC/180509/25)

53. Dates of future meetings

It was noted that the meetings in 2009/2010 would be held as follows (venues to be confirmed):

Monday 7 September 2009 at 2 p.m.

Monday 9 November 2009 at 2 p.m.

Monday 22 February 2010 at 2 p.m.

Monday 31 May 2010 at 2 p.m.