

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Minute of the meeting held on 8th November 2010

Present: Miss J Batty, Mr S Cannon, Mrs J Chalmers, Ms K Christie (Clerk), Dr B Connolly, Mr L Forsyth, Mr D Leitch, Mr G Hunter, Mr B Lockhart (Chair), Dr G Mackintosh, Ms M McHaney, Prof P McGeorge, Dr J Morrison, Mr R Parker, Mr S Robertson Mr A Ryan, Ms C Ryan, Mr B Snelling, Mr A Wight with Miss S Anthony (Minutes).

Apologies: Dr L Foley.

10. Welcome

10.1 Mr Lockhart introduced himself as the new Convener of the Student Affairs Committee (SAC), and welcomed Drs John Morrison and Bernadette Connolly to the SAC, in their capacity as Conveners of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees respectively. Conveners of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees are appointed for a 2-year period and have replaced the roles of Conveners of the Academic Standards Committees (UG and PG) on the SAC. The revised composition and membership of the SAC is available at <http://abdn.ac.uk/admin/sac.shtml>.

11. Matters arising from the minutes

11.1 The minutes from the meeting of 6th September 2010 were approved.
(copy filed as SAC/081110/09)

Appeals and Complaints (Minute 2.5 refers)

11.2. The Director of Academic Affairs updated the Committee on the progress of the draft streamlined approach to the Appeals and Complaints procedures proposed as a result of the summer Kaizen exercise. The Committee noted that the proposals will be put before the UCTL in December 2010 and Senate in February 2011; Court would be asked to approve the changes via convener's action. The proposals will be circulated to SAC members in advance of Senate with feedback welcomed and, if necessary, an extraordinary meeting of the Committee called. The Committee further noted that it was intended that the revised policy be implemented with immediate effect following Senate.

Action:

Clerk

12. Annual Local Survey of Postgraduate Research Students 2010 and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2010.

12.1 The Committee discussed the results of the 2010 surveys of Postgraduate Research students (PGRs) and Postgraduate Taught students (PGTs), noting that they had also been discussed at the Postgraduate Committee (PGC) and UCTL.

(copies filed as SAC/081110/11 and SAC/081110/12)

12.2 The Committee noted that the Postgraduate Research Student Survey was designed and analysed in-house to interrogate the experience of UoA students and had revealed no surprises. It was further noted that students surveyed were generally happy with their experiences, although it was recognised that the areas of supervision, skills training and the availability of office space were areas requiring review, which the PGC would undertake. The Students' Association (SA) were disappointed that some research students felt the SA was not applicable to them, and undertook to

work with the Graduate Schools to look at ways to raise the profile of the SA within the PGR (and to an extent the PGT) community.

Action: SA

12.3 The Committee noted that this was the first time the University has participated in the national PTES survey of PGTs run by the Higher Education Academy, and that whilst the response rate was low, it was higher than the national average. It further noted that the PGC had expressed concern over the validity of the data, due to (i) the survey been openly accessible over the web and (ii) the majority of responses had come from domestic students rather than European or International Students, which is not representative of our PGT population. The main area highlighted by students for improvement was feedback on assessment, echoing views expressed in other surveys including the National Student Survey (NSS). The Committee noted that this issue would be addressed by the PGC working with Colleges and UCTL.

12.4 The Committee was informed that the PGC had agreed that local surveys had the benefit of contextualisation, i.e. they could be tailored to the University's specific concerns, and that the PGC had agreed that the separate local surveys should be run in 2011 to evaluate the experiences of both Taught and Research Postgraduate students.

13. Draft Strategic Plan

13.1 The Committee noted the latest version of the proposed 5 year Strategic Plan to be presented to Senate in November 2010. The Committee also noted that the plan was the result of, and made efforts to capture, the genuine, widespread and inclusive consultation that had occurred. It was further noted that suggestions as to how the plan might be made more unique to Aberdeen University were welcomed

(copy filed as SAC/081110/13)

13.2 The Committee noted that work was already underway to identify the more operational activities and agendas required to take forward the aims of the strategic plan to ensure outcomes are met. As such suggestions regarding appropriate performance measures to underpin the high level outcomes would be welcomed.

13.3 More specifically, the Committee noted the Strategic Plan sought to address key concerns raised in the recent surveys such as assessment and feedback, and it discussed the themes put forward in Strategic Objective 3 (Interdisciplinary Themes). The Committee also noted the current absence of a performance measure relating to staff development for Strategic Objective 1 (Learning & Teaching) was being addressed and would be incorporated into the Learning & Teaching Operational Plan.

13.4 The Committee noted that further feedback on the draft strategic plan should be emailed to strategicplan@abdn.ac.uk by 19th November 2010.

14. Students' Association

National Student Survey (NSS) Results

14.1 The Committee received a summary of the results of the National Student Survey (NSS), which the University had taken part in for the fourth time in 2010. In addition to the paper summarising the results, the Committee received detailed responses from each of the Colleges and the Students' Association. These comments were in response to information provided to each College detailing breakdowns by subject and discipline, where results for the University have been above the required threshold. The Committee was informed that all NSS results were now with Schools who would be responding to immediate concerns in their respective discipline areas.

14.2 The Committee noted that Assessment and Feedback remains a key concern, as is the case across the HEI sector. The Committee acknowledged that within the University the student and staff perception and expectation of feedback is perhaps inconsistent and noted that a working group of the Undergraduate Committee (to include SA representation) was to meet to discuss the issues coming out of the NSS and how best to proceed. The Committee asked to be kept informed of progress.

Action:

Clerk

14.3 The Committee noted that the SA intended to redouble effort to engage students in the annual student-led teaching awards exercise.

14.4 In concluding its NSS discussions, the Committee noted that 89% of Aberdeen respondents had indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of their course. The Committee felt this was indicative of students' general positivity towards their wider student experience, reflecting they had enjoyed their studies, and were positive about the opportunities their studies would lead to.

Higher Education Funding

14.5 The Committee discussed the effect of the Higher Education cuts in England and how this may affect public spending in Scotland. In doing so the Committee noted the SA was encouraging students to write to the Government to express their concerns, and that 150 Aberdeen students would be travelling to London to participate in the national student demonstration outside Parliament in November 2010. It was noted that the Scottish solution to the funding deficit would most likely be revealed in the Green Paper expected in December and will not take effect until the following academic year. The Committee noted that it has been proposed that cuts may be anywhere between 6-16%, and that whilst a cut at the lower end of this scale was considered manageable, budgets were under review, and that the University is looking to cut costs where appropriate.

Postgraduate academic space

14.6 The President of the SA drew attention to concerns expressed by PGR students regarding office space being taken away from them during writing-up periods. The Convener of the Postgraduate Committee clarified that students are entitled to office space during supervised their study period only and office space thereafter is at the discretion of the school and subject to available facilities.

SA Activities

14.7 The SA Sabbatical Officers updated the Committee on their recent activities, which included the organisation of the 'Reclaim the Night' March in association with Amnesty International, a variety of charity events, enhanced class rep training, encouraging societies to make best use of the Butchart Centre, and the development of the 'ClubCap' award to be piloted within the sports union and which is intended to bridge the gap between incoming and outgoing sports union committee members. Further details are available in the summary paper submitted following the meeting by the SA and filed as SAC/081110/15.

15. Reports

15.1 The Committee noted the following reports:

- a) Directorate of Student Affairs
- b) Directorate of Academic Affairs

(copy filed as SAC//081110/16)

(copy filed as SAC//081110/17)

16. AOCB

16.1 The Committee noted the SA' s request that a review of examinations in Butchart be considered, as it was felt important that Butchart should maintain a social space for students at all times. The Secretary to the University advised that the University would work together with the SA to explore longer term solutions to exam venues.

16.2 The Committee was briefly updated on progress of the Student Centre, and the Infohub in particular. It was noted that an Infohub ezine to the whole student body was planned, the main focus being to highlight the new 500+ FAQ's about to go live on the Infohub website, and to encourage participation in a brief online survey to gather feedback from students on the transition of services from the Student Reception to the Infohub.

17. Dates of next meeting

The next meeting of the Student Affairs Committee will be held on **Monday 21 February 2010 at 2 pm in Committee Room 2.**