

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Minute of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

Present: Ms J Batty, Ms J Bjorkqvist, Mrs J Chalmers, Dr B Connolly, Mr L Forsyth, Dr L Foley, Mr G Hunter, Mr B Lockhart (Chair), Dr G Mackintosh, Ms M McHaney, Mr S McNally, Dr J Morrison, Mr R Parker, Mr A Ryan, Ms C Ryan, Mr B Snelling, Ms J Sewell, Mr A Wight, Ms K Christie (Clerk), with Ms J Donald (Minutes).

Apologies: Mr S Cannon, Mr D Leitch, Prof P McGeorge, Mr S Robertson.

**26. Matters arising from the minutes**

26.1 The minutes of the meeting of 21 February 2011 were approved.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/32)*

Appeals and Complaints (Minute 18.2 refers)

26.2 The Committee noted that early indications from the new appeals/complaints process suggest that the process is operating effectively. At the time of writing 37 appeals or complaints had been received since the new process came into force. More than half of these are already closed and 17 out of 21 were closed within the tight time frames established by the new process. The Students' Association (SA) registered its support for the new process, adding that there had been a significant increase in workload for the SA Appeals & Complaints Case Officer as more students were seeking to resolve issues informally.

Official University responses to student surveys (Minute 18.4 refers)

26.3 The Committee noted that at present the Communications team does not automatically advise staff of official University responses to student survey results reported in the press, unless there is anything of particular significance. The Head of Communications has advised however, that the Communications team is actively looking at this issue, and how best staff can be made aware of such news items and University responses thereto.

Rectorial Election (Minute 20 refers)

26.4 The Committee noted that in light of complaints received in regard to possible breaches of the campaign rules the University had decided in the interests of fairness to all candidates and campaign teams to declare the election null and void and to reopen the election process (including call for nominations) in the autumn. It further noted that the University Senate will be asked to approve a new timeline for the autumn election, and it will be open to all candidates including those from this election who wish to stand.

26.5 The Committee noted the lack of clarity as regards the Rector's and Rector's Assessor's positions from the end of June 2011. The Director of Academic Affairs confirmed that in terms of the Ordinance, such appointments were for a fixed period of three years; she undertook to ensure that the Rector and his Assessor would receive formal clarification of the situation as soon as possible.

**Action: Director of Academic Affairs**

26.6 On behalf of the Committee, the Convenor conveyed thanks to the Rector and Rector's Assessor for their valued contributions to the work of the Committee during their periods of office.

Debater (Minute 22 refers)

26.7 The Committee noted that it has been agreed that Debater events attracting an outside audience will be held, if available, in the Old Senate Room. Other events will continue to be scheduled in the MacRobert building in a room of an appropriate size with required facilities.

## **27. Enhancing Student Support**

27.1 The Committee received a paper outlining proposals for changes to the University's student support system, and in particular the University-wide advising system.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/33)*

27.2 The Committee noted the paper set out two stands of support (i) a system of peer mentoring provided by students and (ii) a new personal tutoring system provided by academic staff. It further noted that it was the intention to introduce the personal tutoring system with effect from September 2012, with the new peer mentoring system being piloted in the School of Medical Sciences during session 2011/2012.

27.3 The Committee was advised that a UCTL working group would meet during the summer of 2011 to develop the proposals in more detail, and would seek to include the SA in the membership of this group. The SA suggested that the National Union of Students (NUS) charter for personal tutors may be of interest to the working group.

27.4 The Committee noted its support for the proposals.

## **28. Feedback on Assessment**

28.1 The Committee noted that a short-life working group, which included the SA President for Education and Employability, had been created in response to the University of Aberdeen's 'feedback on assessment' score in the National Student Survey.

*(copy filed as  
SAC/300511/34)*

28.2 The Committee further noted that the group had drafted plans for a central university website, possibly to be housed within the new Virtual Learning Environment planned for September, to bring together information about feedback addressing both student and staff needs, and which was intended to enhance both staff and student understanding of feedback on assessment and associated University procedures.

28.3 The Committee noted its support for the initiative and its interest in seeing how the website developed.

## **29. Student Services Engagement with Foresterhill**

29.1 The Committee noted that with a University commitment to consider how best to provide Infohub services at the Foresterhill site (CRef recommendation 31), and more students being based at Foresterhill with the loss of Marischal College, the Careers Services, Student Support Services, the SA and Student Centre had met to consider a partnership approach to the delivery of their respective services at the Foresterhill campus.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/35)*

29.2 The Committee further noted possibilities being discussed included seeking to provide opportunities for students to (i) pre-book meetings with Kings College advisers (Careers and Student Support Services) and (ii) to attend information sessions and sabbatical surgeries run by the SA with the specialist services and SA committing to being in attendance at Foresterhill at pre-determined times each week.

29.3 The Committee noted that the working group would be investigating the issues involved during the summer period, and in doing so welcomed the initiative, but stressed the importance of (i) including representatives from Foresterhill and Estates in discussions going forward, and (ii) ensuring that the Foresterhill student calendar was also taken into consideration.

**Action: SA General Manager / Head of Student Centre**

### **30. Students' Association**

#### Student Car Parking

30.1 The Committee noted that with the introduction of controlled parking zones around campus from September 2011, the SA will have full use of the Butchart car park for students. This provides the same number of student car parking areas as is currently the case, but it will be for the SA to decide how the cost of the new parking permits, being introduced for both staff and students across all University venues including Halls of Residence, will be borne.

30.2 The Committee noted that the SA was concerned that University's Travel Plan was primarily staff-focused, and that with University targets to increase the number of part-time, mature and postgraduate taught students, its suggestion that it might be timely to review this plan with an increased focus on student travel issues. It was agreed that the SA President and Assistant Estates Director would address this and related issues in a separate meeting.

**Action: SA President /Assistant Estates Director**

30.3 The Committee agreed that student car parking was a significant issue requiring further discussion and efforts to ensure fairness and consistency across the University Community. The Committee asked to be updated at its next meeting.

**Action: Clerk**

#### Butchart – Phase 2

30.4 The Committee noted SA ideas to enhance the Butchart building which it was hoped would better support students' co-curricular activities and provide the SA with further opportunity to both generate income and save money in the longer term.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/36)*

30.5 The Committee noted that included within the proposals was the need to ensure that the entrance to Butchart met disabled access requirements, and suggested that this should be a priority action. The Rector's Assessor welcomed the intention to develop the Butchart small hall into a multi-purpose performance space.

30.6 The Committee was informed that with several large capital projects nearing their end, the Capital Expenditure Committee was currently in the process of looking ahead to identify longer-term needs and potential projects for the next 10 year period, and that any requests relating to Butchart Phase 2 would have to be fed into this prioritising process.

#### Student-Led Teaching Awards

30.7 The Committee was informed the SA had run a successful Student-led Teaching Award scheme funded by an NUS Scotland Award. Over one hundred nominations had been received for eighty individuals for the following awards: Innovative Teaching, Teaching to Employability, Fantastic Feedback, Advisers of Study, PhD supervisors, and 'Supporting Us Students' (for non academic staff).

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/37)*

30.8 The Committee noted the SA intention to publicise the nominees and winners on the SA's website, and to report on all the good practice identified during the nomination process to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and NUS Scotland. It was suggested that this report should also feed into internal best practice discussions, particularly the Centre for Learning & Teaching's Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice Strategy and dissemination actions.

**Action: President for Education**

30.9 The Committee was impressed at the student response to these awards, and the intention to recognise a range of staff for their very different contributions to the student learning experience. That said, the Committee was aware that these awards were in addition to, and entirely separate from, the existing annual College-based Teaching Awards which were also student-led, and suggested that going forward it might be appropriate to consider unifying these separate Award systems.

**Action: President for Education**

#### AUSA Constitution (Minute 21.1 refers)

30.10 The Committee noted that the SA Council had recently approved the proposal to take the new SA constitution to a referendum during the period 4-6 October 2011. If passed at referendum, it would thereafter also have to be approved by the University Court in December 2011.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/38)*

30.11 The Director of Policy, Planning and Governance (PPG) confirmed that the University Court must approve the SA constitution every five years, and noted that as the draft under review was a markedly different document to the existing constitution there were several important issues that it would be necessary for the SA to discuss with PPG representatives before taking the document to referendum.

**Action: SA President**

30.12 The Committee reiterated its advice that given the document had been prepared by an English firm of solicitors there was a need to ensure conformity with Scots Law; the SA informed the Committee that it intended to consult with the University's legal advisers in this regard.

**Action: SA President**

30.13 The Committee noted that the Equality & Diversity Adviser had some feedback to offer the SA and it was agreed that this would take place outwith the SAC meeting.

**Action: Equality & Diversity Adviser/ SA President**

#### Reports from Sabbatical Officers

30.14 The Committee noted the SA Sabbatical Officers' reports on their recent activities, highlights of which included a review of the class representative system in 2011/12, the creation of a student internship position to review SA welfare services and investigate possible external collaborations in this area and a successful SA election period that saw the highest electoral turnout to date. The Committee congratulated the SA on another very successful sporting period with the Men's Basketball Team being the 2010/11 British University & Colleges' Sports Trophy winners, and also for a tremendous Charities Campaign which had achieved the highest ever total amount raised.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/39)*

### **31. Directorate of Student Affairs**

The Director of Student Affairs briefly presented his report on recent activities within Campus Services, Student Support and University Sport, highlighting in particular that:

- with fewer new students expected in September 2011, significant effort was being made to encourage returning students to opt for University accommodation.
- the Campus Services Residence Support Team is working with the SA and Student Support to promote more responsible use of social networking sites.

*(copy filed as SAC//300511/40)*

### **32. Directorate of Academic Affairs**

The Director of Academic Affairs updated the Committee on recent activities within Registry, the Careers Service, the Centre for Learning & Teaching and the Student Centre. In particular, the Committee noted that:

- the Careers Service is collaborating in the Learning to Work 2 (LTW2) project 'Embedding Work Placements in Taught Masters Programmes. This three year project in collaboration with the Universities of Edinburgh and Stirling seeks to work with identified and interested Masters programmes to source and deliver work-based placement opportunities within the Scottish Government's key economic sectors of energy, financial and business services, life sciences, and tourism.
- The Centre for Learning & Teaching received over 2000 student responses to a survey to determine what students would most value in the new VLE from September.
- the Undergraduate Team in Registry is working with the Web Team in DIT to produce new web pages aimed at assisting students in regard to their progression status from one year to the next
- work is ongoing to plan for the Infohub to assume the student- side of the cash office from September 2011.

*(copy filed as SAC/300511/41)*

### **33. AOCB**

The Convenor questioned the frequency of the Student Affairs Committee meetings, and whether a September meeting was useful given the other commitments of most Committee members at this time of year. It was agreed to follow this up outwith the meeting.

***Action: Clerk***

### **34. Dates of meetings in 2011/2012**

The meetings in 2011/2012 will be held as follows at 2 p.m. in Committee Room 2, University Office:

- Monday 5 September 2011 (Minute 33 refers)
- Monday 7 November 2011
- Monday 20 February 2012
- Monday 28 May 2012