

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Minute of the meeting held on 28 May 2012
(Confirmed)**

Present: Ms J Batty, Ms T Birley, Ms J Bjorkqvist, Mr S Cannon, Ms K Christie (Clerk), Dr B Connolly, Mr A Downie, Mr L Forsyth, Dr L Foley, Mr G Hunter, Mr B Lockhart (Chair), Dr M Mackie, Dr G Mackintosh, Prof P McGeorge, Dr J Morrison, Mr S O'Rourke, Mr A Wight with Ms A Hogg (Minutes).

Apologies: Mr K Stewart, Mr B Snelling

1. The minutes of the meeting of 20 February 2012 were approved.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/01)

2. Matters arising from the minutes

Butchart Phase 2 (Minute 1.3 refers)

2.1 The Committee noted that Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) and Estates have had further discussions regarding the possible inclusion of AUSA premises as part of the 10-year capital investment plan. AUSA are now in the process of writing a brief proposal that will be brought to Estates to estimate the costs of two options; the first for a refurbishment of the existing Butchart Centre building, and the second for a new build.

Academic Year (Minute 1.4 refers)

2.2 The Committee noted the Academic Year Working Group had met several times since the last SAC meeting and had considered a variety of models including approaches adopted at other institutions. A proposed model and supporting paper for consultation is currently in development. Once the paper is finalised the Working Group intend to embark on a consultation phase with stakeholders including Colleges, Schools, central university sections and the student body.

Societies' Space (Minute 1.5)

2.3 The Committee noted no issues had arisen as regards Societies' out-of-hours access to suitable accommodation during the second semester.

Personal Tutoring System (Minute 3.1 refers)

2.4 The Committee noted the proposed Personal Tutoring Scheme had been considered by Senate in May 2012 and that whilst there had been general support for the proposal, there had been some question raised regarding the associated staff training requirements. The Committee further noted that Senate had agreed that the pastoral care aspects of the Personal Tutor would come into effect ahead of the academic curricular support element but the latter would follow when the technology required was in place via OneSource. It was also noted that a paper outlining the proposals for implementation of the personal tutoring system will be presented to Senate in June 2012.

Student Parking at Foresterhill (Minute 5.1 refers)

2.5 As there is no capacity to create specified student car parking at Foresterhill, the Committee noted that discussions between AUSA and Estates were in progress regarding the possibility of operating a shuttle bus service for students. The Committee noted that these discussions were in the early stages and no firm agreement had yet been made.

Student-Led Teaching Awards (minute 5.3 refers)

2.6 The Committee noted that, given resource difficulties this year within AUSA, the Student-Led Teaching Awards had been postponed until next academic year.

Update on Student Surveys (Minute 7.1 refers)

2.7 The Committee noted that the Institutional Student Survey of all undergraduate students in years 1 to 3 had now closed, with 39.5% of eligible students having responded. The responses will now be analysed during the summer and a report brought to a future Student Affairs Committee (SAC) meeting. The Committee further noted that the National Student Survey (NSS) had also closed and a report detailing the findings would also be brought to a future SAC meeting.

Action: Clerk

3. Feedback Framework and Partnership Agreement

3.1 The Committee noted that the University Committee for Teaching & Learning (UCTL) had agreed that the Feedback Framework and Partnership Agreement be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they are kept up-to-date and fit for purpose.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/02)

3.2 The Committee further noted that UCTL had agreed the Feedback Framework be amended to ensure Schools make clear in course guides when students can expect to receive feedback and furthermore, in the case where deadlines for feedback are not met students should be informed of the reasons for this. The Committee also noted that UCTL had agreed the Framework be updated to replace references to PDP with information on Achieve, Graduate Attributes and Feedback logs.

3.3 The Committee noted that UCTL had felt that the status of the Partnership Agreement was slightly ambiguous and that consequently a review would be undertaken by UCTL working group which would include student representatives.

4. Risk Register Update

4.1 The Committee noted the University has introduced a more robust system for management of risk and that risk registers had been created at corporate level, College level and also in support of the various Operational Plans which support the Strategic Plan. The Committee was asked to comment on one particular Corporate Risk in regards to 'Failure to Meet Student Expectations' but had no amendments to suggest at this time.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/03)

4.2 Given recent changes in Committee membership, the Committee felt it would be helpful for the Committee to be briefed on the development and operation of University Risk Register system

Action: Clerk

5. Aberdeen University Students' Association

Residents' Committees Proposal

5.1 The Committee noted AUSA's proposal for the introduction of Residents' Committees aimed at encouraging wider student participation in Residence issues, fostering a greater sense of community amongst residents, and for those involved in Committee work, helping to develop transferable skills. The Residents' Committees would be made up of elected representatives from each residence and would be independent of AUSA.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/04)

5.3 The Committee noted that the proposal had been developed following consultation with representatives from other institutions including Heriot-Watt University and the University of Leeds.

5.4 The Committee was supportive of the proposal in principle, but noted (i) not all students in UoA accommodation are UoA students and (ii) UoA students also live in non-UoA student accommodation, and both of these categories of students should be included in these discussions. Further it was noted that resource requirements would have to be clearly identified, and that any proposals should draw upon the existing support services available to UoA accommodation residents.

5.4 It was finally noted that the Director of Student Affairs would work with AUSA to develop the proposal further, with a more detailed plan to be brought to a future meeting of the SAC.

Action: Director of Student Affairs / AUSA

Accommodation Fees Increase

5.6 The Committee noted the response from AUSA to the increase in University accommodation fees for 2012/13 and in particular its request that fees be frozen for the next academic year.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/05)

5.7 The Committee noted AUSA's concerns including (i) that accommodation fee increases would further increase financial demands on students at a time when the cost of living in Aberdeen is already very high, (ii) the standard of accommodation of Esslemont and Burnett houses and (iii) the 'first come, first served' method for allocating student accommodation which was perceived as unfair for those students, such as those entering via clearing, who could only apply for accommodation 'late'.

5.8 The Committee noted that the rise in accommodation tariffs came at a time of increasing staff and utility costs, and when the accommodation team were responding to student requests for enhanced social spaces within residences, and for funds to be set aside to help residents in financial difficulty. It was further noted that the basic non-catered accommodation is the second most economical in Scotland and that the University offers a variety of tariffs to address differing needs and income levels of students. However, although tariffs had already been published for 2012/12, the Director of Student Affairs informed the

Committee that the tariff for Esslemont and Burnett Houses would be frozen for 2012/13 in light of ongoing building works which would disturb residents and require them to be relocated temporarily; AUSA noted its support of this decision.

5.9 The Committee briefly discussed the method of allocation of student accommodation, noting that for the past 2 years all residents have received their preferred option for accommodation and that conducting means testing for each applicant would be impractical.

5.10 The Committee noted that in future it would be appropriate for the accommodation fee proposals to be discussed at SAC before submission to the University Management Group (UMG).

Action: Clerk

University Sport Proposal and Outdoor Sports Provision

5.11 The Committee received two papers from AUSA relating to sports provision at the University of Aberdeen and Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV). However, whilst the Committee noted AUSA's concerns, it recognised the importance of such discussions being a triangular debate with representatives from AUSA, the University and ASV, rather than a matter for the SAC.

(copies filed as SAC/280512/06 & SAC/280512/0607)

Departmental Societies Fund

5.12 The Committee noted AUSA's proposal to introduce a £5000 central fund to support School/discipline society activities aimed at enhancing student employability and student retention; the funds would be available to all AUSA discipline societies and non-affiliated societies with a connection to a specific University discipline. It was suggested such activities would encourage students to work closely with academic staff as well as providing learning and networking opportunities.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/08)

5.13 The Committee noted that in order to qualify for funding, all applications would be expected to be fully supported by the relevant Head of School.

5.14 The Committee was supportive of the proposal but noted it would be important to ensure no duplication of, or competition with, other School or centrally organised activities. Further AUSA was advised that it would be important to develop clear guidelines as to (i) who would evaluate the applications and (ii) the criteria for evaluation, which is was suggested, should include how Societies would demonstrate 'effectiveness' of the proposed activities. The Committee suggested that AUSA write to the Development Trust to seek financial support for the project.

Action: AUSA

5.15 The Committee also noted that the University had made available £50,000 to which Colleges and Schools had been invited to apply, to support initiatives identified in School retention action plans, or to support any additional retention-related activities being considered for the start of the next academic year

Report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers

5.16 The Committee noted the AUSA and Sabbatical Officers' report on their recent activities, highlights of which included

- The success of the election process for the 2012/13 AUSA Executive and Standing Committees, with a turnout of approximately 20% of AUSA membership.
- The approval of the new AUSA constitution by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR); the new constitution will come into practice from the 1st August 2012.
- A recent referendum amongst the student population had confirmed that AUSA would continue to affiliate with the National Union of Students (NUS).
- The Student President had been elected to the NUS UK Trustee Board for the next 2 years.
- Successful charity campaigns such as the Torch Parade and the Student Show.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/09)

6. Directorate of Student Affairs

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

- A new approach to alcohol related disciplinary offences is being piloted: in appropriate cases a resident is being offered the choice of a small fine providing s/he makes an appointment and discusses the implications of alcohol fuelled misbehaviour with a Student resident Assistant or accepting a much larger fine. Monies received are forwarded to the hardship fund administered by Student Support.
- A number of successful events have been held for residents in halls over the last few months including a Spring Fling, Crombie Johnston Talent show and a cookery workshop at Hillhead.

7. Directorate of Academic Affairs

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

- The Centre for Learning and Teaching are involved in the development of an online tool for students in regard to feedback on assessment. *Feedback Logs* will allow students to record and reflect upon feedback received across the full range of their courses, and will be housed within the ePortfolio facility in MyAberdeen.
- The Code of Practice on Student Discipline has been revised and is currently going through Committee approval. The main change is to bring the Code into line with the current Appeals and Complaints policy, concerning medical and extenuating circumstances. Further revision will be undertaken during 2012/2013 to split the Code into two parts: academic and non-academic discipline.

(copy filed as SAC/280512/11)

8. AOCB

The Committee noted this would be Mr Lockhart's final meeting of SAC, and expressed its thanks and appreciation to him for his work in chairing the committee over the past two years.

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Student Affairs Committee will be held on Monday 15 October 2012 at 2.00 p.m in Committee Room 2.