

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Minute of the meeting held on 15 October 2012

- Present: Ms J Bjorkqvist, Mr L Bebbington, Mr S Cannon (Chair), Ms K Christie (Clerk), Ms A Deseilligny, Dr L Foley, Mr G Hunter, Dr A Lumsden, Dr M Mackie, Mr G Maloney, Prof P McGeorge, Ms C McWilliams, Mr R Murray, Ms J Shireffs, Rev E Smart, Mr B Snelling, Ms J Tuckwell with Mrs A Whyte (Minutes).
- Apologies: Ms S Beverstock, Ms E Carlen, Mrs J Chalmers, Mr, L Forsyth, Mr A Khan, Dr G Mackintosh, Dr W Naphy, Dr R Wells, Mr A Wight

The Committee welcomed Ms J Shirreffe who will convene the Student Affairs Committee with effect from the next meeting. In addition Reverend Easter Smart from the University Chaplaincy and Mr Laurence Bebbington from the University Library were welcomed to the committee membership.

1. The minutes of the meeting of 28 May 2012 were approved.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/01)

2. Matters arising from the minutes

- 2.1 Foresterhill – Old Aberdeen Bus Service (Minute 2.5 refers)
The Committee noted that the number 6 First Bus service had been replaced by a more affordable subsidised the Stagecoach service 9U on 17 September 2012. The Committee further noted that, so far, the service had received a relatively positive response from the University Community, although there had been some instances of late running services.
- 2.2 Personal Tutoring System (Minute 3.1 refers)
The Committee noted that an implementation plan for the introduction of Personal Tutors from September 2013 was considered and approved by Senate in June 2012, and that work is ongoing to develop online training materials, planned for roll out in January 2013. The University Management Group (UMG) had approved a Steering Group, including representatives from the Colleges and Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA), to oversee the implementation of the Personal Tutor system.
- 2.3 Partnership Agreement (Minute 3.3 refers)
The Committee was informed that a University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) working group has been convened to review the Partnership Agreement. The group will meet for its initial meeting on 9 October 2012, and will report to UCTL on 31 October 2012.
- 2.4 Residents' Committees Proposals (Minute 5.1 refers)
The Committee noted that AUSA were still keen to pursue the concept of Residents' Committees however had still to finalise their thoughts on the issue. AUSA undertook to contact the Director of Student Affairs and Head of Accommodation in due course.

Action: AUSA

3. Review of the Academic Year

- 3.1 The Committee discussed two proposed models, endorsed by the University Senior Management Team (SMT), which aimed to capture the optimum academic year structure from a pedagogical perspective.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/02)

- 3.2 The Committee noted that both models have exams before Christmas, (the UoA is one of the few institutions in Scotland, and only ancient HEI, to have post-Christmas exams), teaching semesters have been decreased from 12 to 11 weeks and the summer resit diet has been brought forward to immediately post-graduations. A revision period for all examination diets has been maintained, and introduced for the summer resit diet. Models 1 and 2 differ only in the placement of the Easter vacation, and consequently whether or not all second-half session teaching takes place before, or after, this vacation period.

3.3 The Committee agreed that moving exams pre-Christmas would allow students to have a proper break over the festive period and also take advantage of employment opportunities at that time. However, the Committee also acknowledged that having exams pre-Christmas would reduce the time for students to reflect on their studies prior to the examination diet.

3.4 The Committee noted that there would be advantages and disadvantages to the proposals but on balance agreed that both models, particularly in the second-half session (as students should receive their first half-session results before the end of the 2-week period for changing course in the second half-session) were an improvement on the existing structure.

3.5 The Committee were made aware that changes to the academic year could impact on income generated to the University, for example from accommodation income as a result of events such as Offshore Europe; however, but it was agreed that the priority is to establish the best teaching structure for the student learning experience.

3.6 AUSA reported that student body indicated a mixed response to the proposals, and that AUSA would be holding a referendum on the issue. The Committee hoped that (i) AUSA would be clear to the student body that the issue of the academic year had been re-instigated by the previous Student President and sabbatical team, and that the Working Group that developed the proposals had included AUSA representation, and (ii) the student turnout would be high, so that the validity of the referendum outcome would be without question.

3.7 The Committee noted that the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) was in the process of consulting with each of the College Executives and the Directorate Group regarding the proposals. It further noted that the proposals would be discussed at UCTL and Senate in October and November 2012 respectively, and that the committee would be kept updated of progress.

Action: Clerk

4. National Student Survey 2012

4.1 The Committee noted the summary of the results of the 2012 National Student Survey (NSS) and Institutional Student Survey (ISS), the latter having been undertaken for the first time in 2012.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/03)

4.2 In regards to the NSS the Committee noted that the University's performance in 2012 was close to that achieved in 2011, with 89% of students indicating overall satisfaction compared to 88% in 2011. However, there were a number of areas this year where levels have fallen.

4.3 The Committee noted that feedback on assessment remains a low-scoring area as evidenced in both the NSS and ISS results, a trend that was apparent in NSS results for the Scottish Sector in general. In particular students did not feel that they received feedback promptly, and thus in time to influence subsequent assessments. The Committee noted that it was important for Schools to clearly explain to students what they should expect in terms of the timeliness of return of marks and feedback, and that quality feedback on assessment takes time.

4.4 The Committee further noted that the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) had met with each Head of School to discuss the survey findings in more detail and that, in particular, each School has been asked to provide information on the promptness of turnaround times for marking and feedback on assessment.

4.5 The Committee was made aware that whilst the NSS results indicate we perform better in questions related to 'personal development' than other institutions in Scotland, and the sector in general, the ISS results show that institutionally work is required to improve students' understanding of, and ability to, articulate their graduate attributes to employers and other third parties.

4.6 The Committee noted that AUSA will use the results of the surveys with School Convenors to try to 'unpick' the reasons behind the poor performing areas of the survey.

5. Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic)

5.1 The Committee noted that the Code of Practice on Student Discipline had been revised to create two separate sections, covering academic and non-academic matters respectively, and that the latter section had been revised to make it clearer and easier to follow for both staff and students.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/04)

5.2 The Committee noted the main changes for non-academic matters included (i) reducing the number of process stages, thus enabling issues to be resolved at the lowest possible level; (ii) introducing the option, in

minor cases, for a student to accept a financial penalty without the need for a full Disciplinary Hearing; (iii) bringing the appeals process in line with the University's Appeals and Complaints Policy

5.3 AUSA expressed concern that a monetary penalty instead of a full disciplinary hearing would discriminate against students who are less financially secure, however the Committee was reassured that the policy allowed for students to choose this option if they wished, and that students would always have the right to a hearing if preferred.

5.5 The Committee was supportive of the proposed changes, and noted that the revised Code would be submitted to UCTL on 31 October 2012, for formal approval. *[Clerks note: revisions were endorsed at UCTL on 31 October and forwarded to Senate for routine approval 14 November 2012]*

6. Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA)

Access Campaign

6.1 AUSA briefed the Committee was briefed about its priority campaign for 2012/2013, which is centred on the AUSA tagline "to create a campus we can all be a part of".

(copy filed as SAC/151012/05)

6.2 The Committee noted the campaign is made up of three main strands:

- Widening Access - ensuring students from disadvantaged backgrounds have as many opportunities as others to go to university
- Access to Education – ensuring international students enjoy their experience whilst at the University as well as ensuring students take full advantage of study abroad opportunities
- Access to Employment – ensuring all students from all backgrounds have the same access to employment opportunities

6.3 The Committee further noted that AUSA had been invited to a meeting to discuss the widening access targets in the outcome agreements being prepared for the Scottish Funding Council.

National Demonstration

6.4 The Committee noted the National Union of Students (NUS) has called for a National Demonstration to take place on the 21 November 2012 under the slogan 'Educate, Employ, Empower', and that AUSA would be providing transport to London to allow students to attend.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/06)

6.5 The Committee also noted that as part of its campaign to support the demonstration, AUSA will be presenting a charter for employment to the City Council.

Report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers

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

- Redevelopment of the AUSA website, which amongst other enhancements would provide online club and society membership and an in-house Elections system
- The appointment of a new Education Development Coordinator to support the class representative system and Postgraduate and Distance learners.
- The lobbying of local nightclubs to sign up to 'zero tolerance' protocols regarding sexual harassment in their premises; if successful, Aberdeen would be the first city in the UK to have such a protocol in place.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/07)

Report from the Rector

6.7 The Committee noted the Rector's Report.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/08)

6.8 The Committee noted the Rector's request to Court that consideration be given to the Arts Lecture Theatre as a potential performance space, and suggestion that as a project it could be used to commemorate the late Rector, Stephen Robertson.

6.9 The Rector reported on the main points arising from his recent meeting of Scottish Rectors including the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland, the development of a Rector's Charter, the UK Border Agency's approach to student immigration and the funding of higher education.

6.10 The Rector shared with the Committee a paper that the Scottish Rectors had discussed regarding the issue of the funding of higher education in the UK and the operation of the differing tuition fee policies of the UK and Scottish Governments. The Committee noted that the Scottish Rectors were considering whether to seek further debate within their respective Courts regarding the current funding regime for undergraduates in the UK.

7. Directorate of Student Affairs

7.1 The Committee were briefed on recent activities within Campus Services, Student Support and University Sport.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/09)

7.2 The Committee noted in particular that:

- Undergraduate accommodation applications for the new academic year had increased dramatically on 2011; private providers had been approached enabling provision of additional bed spaces.
- The September 2012 Induction Programme for new students had run smoothly.
- Counselling Service statistics for 2011/12 indicate that client numbers rose significantly on 2010/11, but appointment numbers have remained relatively static as the average number of appointments per client dropped.

8. Directorate of Academic Affairs

The Committee noted the report on recent activities within Registry, the Careers Service, the Centre for Learning & Teaching and the Student Centre.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/10)

9. Remit, Composition and Membership

The Committee noted the Remit, Composition and Membership of the Committee in 2012/2013.

(copy filed as SAC/151012/11)

10. AOCB

10.1 The Head of Student Support advised the Committee that local GP surgeries are experiencing a significant increase in the number of students requiring official letters to confirm medical circumstances, particularly around examination diets. It was further noted that time spent preparing such letters affords GPs less time to spend with patients requiring immediate attention.

10.2 The Committee noted the Head of Student Support had raised the need for such 'formal' evidence of student medical circumstance with Registry. The Committee requested an update on this issue at a future meeting.

Action: Clerk

10. Dates of next meetings

The meetings in 2012/2013 will be held as follows in Committee Room 2, University Office:

- Monday 18 February 2013 at 2 p.m.
- Monday 13 May 2013 at 2 p.m.