

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Minute of the meeting held on 18 February 2013

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

Apologies: Ms S Beverstock, Ms E Carlin, Mr G Maloney, Mr A Khan, Dr W Naphy

1. The minutes of the meeting of 15 October 2012 were approved.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/01)

2. Matters arising from the minutes

2.1 There were no matters arising from the last meeting of the Student Affairs Committee, other than those already on the agenda.

3. Corporate Risk Register

3.1 The Committee received a presentation from Policy, Planning and Governance regarding the rationale for, aims of, and process for monitoring the Corporate Risk Registrar. The Committee also noted the most recent updates to the Corporate Risk 'Failure to Meet Student Expectations'. The Committee requested that future risk register documentation is produced on a larger scale.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/02)

Action: Clerk

3.2 The Committee noted the various ways in which student expectations were gauged, including Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR), Staff-Student Liaison committee meetings, and national and institutional surveys such as NSS, SCEF and Halls of Residence questionnaires, whilst recognising expectations vary from student to student. The importance of reviewing question year on year to ensure they focus and address changing student expectations and issues was noted.

4. Library Actions in Response to Student Feedback in the 2012 Student LibQUAL Survey

4.1 The Committee noted the actions taken, and progress made by the Library, in response to feedback from students on Library, Special Collections and Museums (LSC&M) and its services following the 2012 LibQUAL survey, the first Library survey conducted since the opening of the Sir Duncan Rice Library. LibQUAL is an external, biannual survey; the Library will instigate an internal survey in the intervening years.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/03)

4.2 The Committee noted the number of positive actions being taken by the Library in response to feedback from the survey, in particular in response to concerns regarding noise level, which had attracted the highest number of comments from the survey.

4.3 The Committee also noted that Library staff were using a range of communication tools and social media to keep students informed of progress and updates to Library procedures. It was further noted that a 'You Said, We Did' section had recently been added to the MyAberdeen portal to keep students informed of how the institution was responding to student feedback more widely.

4.4 AUSA wish to note its support of Library staff in responding to student feedback, and the Committee expressed its gratitude to Library staff for their efforts in addressing student concerns.

5. Student Affairs/Campus Services Budget, 2013-2014

5.1 The Committee noted the proposed changes to residence fee rates for 2013/2014, and the continued commitment of the University to guarantee a place in University managed accommodation to all first time students and to any returning students who may require additional support for the entire duration of their studies.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/04)

5.2 The Committee further noted that the proposals keep Aberdeen's rates comparable with other institutions whilst enabling ongoing development of residence services, particularly social spaces, and reflecting the disturbance from the building work that would inevitably be made whilst refurbishments were taking place.

5.3 The Committee noted the importance of maintaining a diversity of rooms on offer at a variety of tariffs to address differing needs and income levels of students. The Committee further noted the importance of ensuring all students are informed of refurbishments in advance of arriving in Aberdeen.

Action: Director of Student Affairs

6. Mitigating Circumstances

6.1 The Committee noted the draft revisions to the policy on medical certification requirements for students being proposed, arising from local GP surgeries experiencing a significant increase in the number of students requiring official letters to confirm medical absences, particularly around examination diets, which in turn afforded GPs less time to spend with patients requiring immediate attention.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/05)

6.2 The Committee noted that the University Committee for Learning & Teaching (UCTL) proposed that from September 2013 students in Level 1 and Level 2 will be permitted to 'self-certify' for all medical absences for periods up to seven days, even if the absence covers a summative assessment event; no change to the policy for students in Levels 3, 4 and 5 is proposed.

6.3 The Committee was informed that Heads of School had highlighted concern regarding the practice of accepting retrospective medical certification. It was agreed that in reviewing the policy, the timelines for reporting illness would also be reviewed, and that a draft policy on medical absences will be considered at the May meeting of UCTL.

6.4 The Committee noted its support of the proposal.

7. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Model Complaint Handling Procedure

7.1 The Committee noted the University's Student Complaints procedure will be reviewed in the coming months, in light of the recently published Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) model complaint handling procedure (CHP) for higher education.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/06)

7.2 It was further noted that all universities are required to adopt the model CHP and publish a compliant CHP in June 2013 for implementation 30 August 2013. To this end, a short-term working group, including student representation, will be established to review the University's current procedure for handling complaints and to make the necessary recommendations for changes to the current process.

7.3 The Committee noted that both the University and AUSA are more than satisfied with the current complaints procedure and hope that only minor modifications to existing procedures will be required to be compliant with SPSO expectations. The Committee suggested that, in light of all the positive comments regarding our current complaints handling procedure, the University appeal directly to the Ombudsman to request permission to continue using its current policy, with minor adaptations to reflect key elements of the MCHP.

Action: Director of Academic Affairs

8. Personal Tutors / Roll out of Peer Mentoring Scheme

8.1 The Committee received an update on progress in regard to the introduction of Personal Tutors and further roll out of the Peer Mentoring Scheme (re-named as Students for Students, 'S4S'), both with effect from September 2013.

(copies filed as SAC/180213/07 and SAC/180213/08)

8.2 The Committee also noted that the Personal Tutor Steering Group had a useful meeting with the Assistant Principal (Learning Developments) from the University of Edinburgh who had played a central role in the implementation of a very similar Personal Tutor scheme at Edinburgh.

8.3 In light of the feedback provided by Edinburgh the Steering Group had (i) asked Schools to appoint one Senior Personal Tutor by the end of January 2013; a Senior Personal Tutor Group will then be established to enable these staff to help inform and assist with the delivery of training and (ii) developed role descriptors for the Personal Tutor and Senior Personal Tutor roles, together with a document setting out what is and isn't the role of a Personal Tutor; AUSA is drafting a similar document on the role of the Personal Tutor for consideration by the next meeting of the Steering Group.

8.4 The Committee noted that following the success of the peer mentoring pilots in the Schools of Medical Sciences and Divinity, History and Philosophy, the scheme would be rolled out across remaining Schools in the University not already operating comparable schemes. It also noted that central to the success of the scheme is an academic within each School who can act as a mentor to the peer mentors and oversee the running of the scheme; Schools have been asked to appoint such an individual by the end of February 2013.

8.5 The Committee noted the Personal Tutors and Peer Mentor schemes were being developed as separate, parallel processes to support the student experience. Integration may be considered in future, but for now it was felt important to keep the mentoring scheme, which is entirely voluntary in nature and, in the main, student organised, separate from the compulsory, university-led personal tutor scheme.

8.6 The Committee noted the Chaplaincy and Alumnus Association would be happy to support the peer mentoring scheme as required.

9. Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA)

Wednesday Afternoons

9.1 The Committee noted AUSA's concern that the introduction of sixth century courses (6CCs) had resulted in increased pressure on the timetable and, with Level 3 and 4 6CCs in development, there was a danger that Wednesday afternoons would be used to timetable lectures rather than be kept free for sport. AUSA was also concerned that students undertaking 6CCs were unable to leave classes early to attend sporting fixtures.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/09)

9.2 The Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching confirmed that there was no plan to change the agreed policy that no required teaching was permitted on Wednesday afternoons without special request to the VP (L&T), and that very few special requests had ever been received or agreed to. Classes scheduled for Wednesday afternoons were always 'optional' classes, and thus provided flexibility in the system for students to keep Wednesday afternoons free.

9.3 In discussing the rationale for continuing to schedule 6CCs on Wednesday mornings, the Committee noted that both Advisers of Studies and students should be made more acutely aware of the strong attendance requirement for these courses at registration.

Action: Clerk

9.4 The Committee noted additional concerns from members regarding the increased pressure on the timetable more generally, and that discussions regarding this would be addressed as part of discussions regarding the re-structuring of the academic year, with which AUSA would be involved.

Report from AUSA and the Sabbatical Officers

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

(copy filed as SAC/180213/10)

- Progress has been made to appoint the full trustee board with both External Trustees and Student Trustees now appointed. There is still one external and one student trustee position vacant and work is currently being done to fill these positions.
- A number of audits have been conducted across AUSA including Health and Safety, current practices and organisational audits. The audits have been undertaken to provide AUSA with recommendations to help develop the organisation further; AUSA is now looking at how best to respond to the recommendations.
- AUSA had taken approximately 100 students to the NUS National Demonstration in London against the UK governments' stance on tuition fees and youth unemployment in November.

10. Directorate of Student Affairs

10.1 The Committee noted the report from the Director of Student Affairs on recent activities within Campus Services, Student Support and University Sport, in particular the good work being done to promote 'Living and Learning' communities, including events organised to bring residents together to make new friends and share cultures, and Student Resident Assistants now being available to residents 24 hours/day.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/11)

11. Directorate of Academic Affairs

11.1 The Committee noted the report from the Director of Academic Affairs on recent activities within Registry, the Careers Service and the Centre for Learning & Teaching.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/12)

12. Report from the Chaplaincy

12.1 The Committee noted the report from the Chaplain. In particular the Committee noted that Court has recently approved incorporating plans for an inter-faith centre in the 10-year Capital Plan; a design brief is expected April 2013.

13. Report from Library, Special Collections and Museums

13.1 The Committee noted the report from the Library, Special Collections and Museums (LSC&M), and in particular that all aspects of LSC&M library opening hours are currently under review following feedback from recent pilots to extend opening hours. AUSA noted its support of the pilots, and commented on the positive feedback it had received from students.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/13)

13.2 The Committee noted that the Library intended that any changes to opening hours would be communicated to students via a range of social media and other communication methods, as had been the case for recent pilots and the current trial in the Special Collections Centre; for the latter it was agreed that another round of publicity would occur.

Action: Deputy Librarian

14. Implementation of the New Academic Year

14.1 The Committee noted the structure to be used to oversee and manage the implementation of the new structure of the academic year with effect from September 2014.

(copy filed as SAC/180213/15)

15. AOCB

Centre for Life Long Learning

15.1 The Committee noted AUSA's opposition to the review of, and proposed changes to, the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL).

15.2 The Committee noted that the review of CLL had arisen as a consequence of the University having lost its Widening Access Grant from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The Committee further noted that the University's enthusiastic commitment to widening access is absolute, as detailed in its Outcome Agreement with the SFC, but that there was a need to review the vehicle for delivering widening access courses at the University. It was also noted that CLL staff had been assured that the review would not lead to redundancies.

Rector

- 15.3 The Committee noted that the Rector had raised the following issues at the March meeting of Court:
- i. The philosophical argument for the charging of tuition fees for non-Home students; the Committee noted this was a sensitive issue, but were pleased to note that the number of applications from international students this year has increased by 25%, and by 20% for RUK applicants when compared with 2012/13 numbers.
 - ii. Recommending the presence of an AUSA sabbatical officer to the Development Trust Board; the Committee noted that whilst it supported the idea in principal, this was an issue to be raised with the Development Trust directly and would be subject to the terms of the Trust
 - iii. That there were positive signs as regards the development of a student performance space, possibly in Butchart Hall, as a temporary solution.

15.4 The Rector requested that his reports to Court become a standing item on the Student Affairs Committee agenda going forward.

Action: Clerk

16. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Student Affairs Committee will be held on Monday 13 May 2013 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2.