

University Committee on Teaching and Learning

Annual Report to the Senate

(17 November 2000)

1. Introduction

1.1 This Report was agreed by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) on 13 October 2000 as the Committee's first Annual Report to the Senate. It covers teaching, learning, assessment and quality assurance issues discussed by the UCTL during 1999/2000, and summarises the issues considered by the Academic Standards Committees (ASCs) and the Undergraduate Programme Committees (UPCs). [The three ASCs submitted their first Annual Reports to the UCTL on 13 October 2000, which included a summary of the work of the related UPCs and their Students' Progress Committees]. The Report also includes data in regard to student progression, academic appeals and academic discipline, and a commentary concerning plagiarism.

2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

2.1 Several policies were re-affirmed or strengthened during 1999/2000, mainly as a consequence of requests from either individual Departments, the ASCs or the Senate Academic Appeals Committees. These included the following:-

- clarification of guidance which Departments may give to students in regard to the nature of written examinations
- reiteration of the policy that, unless there were extenuating circumstances, the timetabling of core-courses should not be changed once publicised
- clarification and strengthening of the policy on the submission of medical certificates by medical practitioners
- confirmation that Departments should use the full range of the Common Assessment Scale (CAS) and that CAS marks should not be averaged, aggregated or rounded up or down
- clarification and strengthening of the regulations concerning Honours programmes by part-time study
- reiteration of the policy concerning examinations held outwith Aberdeen.

2.2 New guidelines and policies were approved in regard to the following:-

- guidelines for students who either fail, or who fail to attend or complete, an element of prescribed degree assessment
- guidelines for the appointment and monitoring of relief teachers
- the effect on degree classification of class certificate refusal in a course which is a part of an Honours programme and failure in an element of Honours assessment
- a minimum level of Communication and Information Technology skills for Aberdeen graduates
- guidelines for the credit-rating and maximum duration of vacation courses
- guidelines concerning the use of mobile phones in examination halls.

2.3 A summary of teaching and learning issues arising from meetings of the UCTL was made available to staff via the e-mail group *dept-info*. Staff were informed that copies of the minutes could be downloaded from the following address: www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/cttelist.hti

6. Issues that required action by Departments were sent to Heads of Department for implementation.

2.5 The Committee also received regular reports on the activities of the Learning Technology Unit (LTU), including an oral presentation by the LTU's Manager.

3. The Assurance of Quality and Standards

3.1 During 1999/2000, the UCTL approved responses to the following documents that related predominantly, but not exclusively, to the Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality and Standards that was being developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA):-

- draft Code of Practice: External Examining
- consultation paper on HE Qualifications Frameworks
- Code of Practice: Students with Disabilities
- draft Levels Descriptors
- DfEE consultation paper on Foundation Degrees.

3.2 The University's one-year progress report in response to the 1998 Academic Quality Audit Report was agreed by the UCTL and forwarded to the QAA in December 1999. The main initiatives in response to the Auditors' suggestions were the introduction of formal procedures for the consideration of accreditation reports from Professional and Statutory Bodies; implementing resource-based learning through the establishment of the Promoting Independent Learning programme; and the establishment of a Working Party on Quality and Standards, primarily to consider how to initiate a University-wide debate on standards.

3.3 Since the University's (and COSHEP's) representations to SHEFC and the QAA to defer, until 2001, the start of the new process of Subject Review (the successor to TQA) were unsuccessful, the Working Party on Quality and Standards also was charged with the remit of recommending how the Internal Teaching Review procedures should relate to the external review process.

3.4 The Working Party organised two seminars as part of the standards debate. It made several recommendations that were approved by the UCTL in May 2000 (and reported to the Senate in June 2000), including new procedures for Programme Review and revised Internal Teaching Review procedures for implementation in 2000/01.

3.5 In May 2000, the QAA published benchmark statements for the 22 subjects to be reviewed in 2000/03, which were sent to the Heads of relevant Departments.

6. The QAA's Codes of Practice on Assessment, External Examining, Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review and on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints on Academic Matters were published between January-May 2000: reports on how the University's current practice and procedures relates to compliance with the guidance and precepts in these, and other, Codes will be considered by the UCTL during 2000/01.

3.7 The UCTL also established a Working Party on Careers Guidance, primarily to consider the issues to be raised in the relevant Section of the QAA's Code of Practice, which was due to be published in the latter part of 2000. And the Committee approved amendments to the University's current practice recommended by the Sub-Committee on Students with Disabilities following its consideration of the QAA's Section of the Code concerning students with disabilities.

4. Reports from Academic Standards Committees

4.1 The main issues considered by the Academic Standards Committees (ASC) are described below.

Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF)

4.2 No major concerns were apparent from the bi-annual monitoring of the SCEF reports from Departments that were considered by the undergraduate ASCs. Iteration between the committees and individual Departments took place in regard to particular outcomes of the SCEF exercise; and the UCTL referred back to the ASC (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity and Law) for further consideration a concern from one Department in regard to the appropriateness of the questions in Section A of the evaluation form.

4.3 The ASC (Postgraduate) referred its concerns in regard to the relatively poor submission rate of postgraduate taught programme reports to the relevant Deans. The Committee will review its programme monitoring procedures for 2000/01 onwards in light of the introduction of formal Programme Review procedures for all taught programmes (paragraph 3.4 above refers).

Internal Teaching Review Reports

4.4 All three ASCs considered relevant Internal Teaching Review Reports, and one-year follow-up progress reports where appropriate. In all cases, the ASCs approved the Head of Department's and Dean's agreed response to the Panel's recommendations. No major issues were identified, although the ASC (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity and Law) agreed to monitor the formation of a Staff-Student Liaison Committee in one Department, as recommended by the Review Panel.

External Examiners' Reports

4.5 The three ASCs received and approved reports from the relevant Deans in regard to Departmental responses to External Examiners' Reports for 1998/99. Two policy issues were referred to the UCTL: as a consequence of some comments from External Examiners, the UCTL re-affirmed to Departments the CAS general principles (paragraph 2.1 above refers); and the UCTL was asked to establish a standard system of interpreting grades awarded at American institutions for use across all Departments: this will be undertaken in 2000/01.

Course and Programme Proposals and Regulatory Changes

4.6 The ASCs approved the following course and programme proposals during 1999/2000 (the undergraduate programmes being approved on the recommendation of the relevant UPC):-

Proposal	ASC (Pg)	ASC (ASS,D &L)	ASC (SEM)	TOTAL
New Programme	9	11	10	30
Amended Programme	28	22	208*	258*
Withdrawn Programme	4	9	9	22

New Course	47	133	113	293
Amended Course	40	339	199	578
Withdrawn Course	49	113	46	208

* includes 132 approved by UPC (Science), primarily as a consequence of re-structuring at Level 1 following the review of the undergraduate modular structure

4.7 Various regulatory changes were also approved and referred to the Senate.

Students' Progress Committees

4.8 The cases of undergraduate students who fail to satisfy the minimum progress requirements are automatically considered by the Students' Progress Committee (SPC) of the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committee. A summary of the SPC decisions for each of the six undergraduate Areas of Study is given in appendix 1.

Student Support

4.9 The undergraduate ASCs received reports from their Undergraduate Programme Committees in regard to the monitoring of the Advising system (the Regent scheme for medical students). Surveys conducted by the UPCs indicated that such students, generally, were very satisfied with the Advising (and Regent) system.

4.10 The ASC (Postgraduate) noted that the annual research student questionnaire had confirmed that returning research students were generally very satisfied with the level of supervision and facilities available to them in the previous session. A summary of the outcome was sent to Deans in the first instance, who were asked to refer issues to Departments, where appropriate. However, the ASC was concerned that a substantial percentage of research students did not appear to have heard of the University's Postgraduate Structured Management Frameworks: Departments were informed that new frameworks had been approved for research degrees other than the PhD degree and were again reminded of the importance of using and defining their own Frameworks.

Other Issues

4.11 The ASCs considered several other issues during 1999/2000. These included the following: the restructuring of Science and Engineering teaching at Level 1 in response to the Review of the Undergraduate Modular Structure, with the concomitant recommendation that Science "units of study" be discontinued; the restructuring of Engineering degrees; the capping of course numbers; the credit-rating of vacation courses; the introduction of a pilot *Grade Spectrum* at postgraduate taught programme level in regard to progression and award; and issues for postgraduate students arising from appeals which led to revisions to the six-monthly research student assessment form and to a review of the English language requirements for admission to postgraduate degrees. The rate of return of the six-monthly research student assessment forms was also unacceptably poor for some Departments. The ASC (Postgraduate) also approved the strengthening of existing practice in a number of areas in accordance with the precepts published in the Section of the QAA's Code of Practice relating to Postgraduate Research Programmes: this included a recommendation that it should be University policy that every research student should be provided with, at the very least, desk-space and a chair, a filing cabinet and appropriate access to computers, which was referred by the UCTL to Deans.

5. Student Progression

5.1 One of the institutional targets in the University's Strategic Plan 2000-2004 is to reduce the number of registered students leaving the University without a qualification by 25%.

6. There are three categories of students who leave the University without obtaining their intended qualification: those who withdraw officially i.e. who complete a Withdrawal From Study form; those who are deemed to have withdrawn by the Students' Progress Committees (paragraph 4.8 refers); and those who are eligible to return in September but who fail to do so. The first category can be sub-divided into In-Sessional Withdrawals (i.e. those who register in September and then submit a withdrawal form before the end of the Summer Term) and those who submit a withdrawal form between the end of the Summer Term and the start of the next academic year.
6. Data in regard to the various categories of former full-time undergraduate students is given in Appendix 1.
6. The University Court (26 September 2000) approved a recommendation from the Senate that students who leave the University without obtaining their intended qualification should automatically be awarded an Undergraduate Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education if they fulfilled the regulatory requirement for those awards. The relevant awards will be made in November 2000 to eligible students who left the University during the 1999/2000 academic year. They will be issued, in the future, as a matter of routine to eligible students who withdraw from the University.

5.5 In regard to withdrawal, the procedures by which students complete withdrawal forms have been revised to ensure that, as far as possible, no student is given a withdrawal form without first discussing their situation with the Clerk for their degree. Such students will be informed of the various options available to them as a possible alternative to withdrawal: these may, in the first instance, include referral to their Adviser of Studies or to relevant Student Support Services. A leaflet has also been prepared to give to students to reinforce these options. The reasons for past student withdrawal (as indicated by students on the withdrawal form) will be analysed, with a view to informing a strengthening of the University's arrangements for student support for the benefit of future students.

6. Academic Appeals

6. Academic appeals that are classed as competent (i.e. those submitted within the required time-limits stipulated in the University's *Guidance Note on Academic Appeals*) are referred initially to the Head of the relevant Department for comment. Some appeals are upheld at this stage, with the Head of the Department consulting the External Examiner(s), where appropriate (e.g. if a Department wished to raise a CAS mark or degree classification in light of the appeal). Students who do not accept the Head of Department's decision in regard to an appeal have the right for their appeal to be considered by the appropriate Senate Academic Appeals Committee; and, if dissatisfied with that outcome, they have a right of further appeal, to the University Court. The *Guidance Note on Academic Appeals* indicates that the Senate and Court committees, in considering any appeal, will limit their consideration to the procedures following in reaching the academic decision and will not scrutinise the academic content of the judgement involved, which is a matter solely for the Departmental Head, Examiners or other persons or committee concerned.
6. A summary of the outcome of academic appeals lodged in 1999/2000 is given in Appendix 2.

7. Academic Discipline

6. The *Code of Practice on Student Discipline* sets out the procedures for making a complaint against a student, including allegations of cheating (which includes plagiarism). The latter are considered to be academic disciplinary cases and should be investigated initially by the Head of the relevant Department. If, after discussing an allegation with a student, the Head of Department considers that an academic offence may have taken place, the Head of Department is required to formally refer the allegation to the University's Disciplinary Investigating Officer (the Senior Vice-Principal). The Disciplinary Investigating Officer meets formally with the student and the Head of Department; and the student may be accompanied or represented by any person of his/her choice. The *Code of Practice on Student Discipline* indicates the range of penalties available to the Disciplinary Investigating Officer if he/she determines that an allegation of cheating should be upheld. Students can either accept the decision

of the Disciplinary Investigating Officer or ask that their case be referred to the Senate Student Disciplinary Committee. Students have the right of an appeal against a decision of the latter Committee to the University Court.

6. A summary of the outcome of disciplinary hearings considered by the Disciplinary Investigating Officer in the last two academic years is given in Appendix 2. In all cases, students accepted the decision and there was no need to convene the Senate Student Disciplinary Committee.

8. Plagiarism

6. Following a case of plagiarism which involved a student down-loading and copying material from the Internet, the UCTL (29 May 1998) agreed that Departments be required to provide the following information in their Departmental/Course Handbooks, as deemed appropriate:-
 - a. the University's definition of plagiarism
 - b. guidance on how to avoid plagiarism in regard to particular types of assessment, which should include the following:-
 - o instructions on the correct methods of referencing sources (i.e. both in footnotes and in the bibliography), with examples
 - o advice on when to use quotation marks
 - o emphasising the importance of a student giving their own interpretation when using, quoting or paraphrasing the work of others (this would include the use of information down-loaded from the Internet)
 - o guidance for those working in groups, to indicate whether or not an individual contribution was expected in regard to the assessment of the work (it was acknowledged that it may be impossible or undesirable to identify individual contributions for some group projects).
6. In addition, Departments were asked, in designing assessments, to make every effort to ensure that the design of an assessment did not promote the possibility of plagiarism, but instead required from the student individual and critical use of resources.
6. Of the 18 disciplinary cases considered in 1998/99, 17 related to plagiarism, 9 of which referred to work submitted as part of one particular course in which multiple cheating had taken place.
6. In 1999/2000, 20 of the 23 cases related to plagiarism, of which 13 were cases of multiple cheating in regard to one course.

6. In view of the above, the UCTL (13 October 2000) agreed that the guidance it provided in 1998 in regard to plagiarism (paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 refer) should be re-iterated to Departments.

Forward Look: 2000/01

9.1 The major issues for consideration by the Committee and the University during 2000/01 relate to the external framework for the assurance of quality and standards being developed by the QAA. This will be focused on providing support to Departments in their preparations for QAA Subject Review and their implementation of the University's procedures for Programme Review and Internal Teaching Review (paragraph 3.4 above refers). External reference points to be used by Academic Reviewers in Subject Review will include the relevant subject benchmark statements, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and relevant sections of the QAA's overarching Code of Practice (paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 above refer).

9.2 As part of the above, a cadre of academic staff will be identified to serve on Internal Teaching Review Panels, and appropriate training will be arranged. A Working Group will also be established to prepare proposals in regard to the drafting of Level Descriptors for use within the university, in conjunction with the SCQF.

6. The Committee will consider the University's compliance with the QAA Code of Practice in the following areas: external examining; programme approval, monitoring and review; academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters; assessment of students; careers education, information and guidance.

9.4 Proposals to establish Progress Files for students, which will incorporate a review of the transcripts provided to students by the university and how students might undertake personal development planning, will also be considered.

9.5 The UCTL also will monitor the progress of the Aberdeen University Programme for Higher Education Teachers (AUPHET) Planning Committee in regard to academic staff fulfilling the requirements for membership of the Institute for Learning and Teaching for Higher Education.

6. The UCTL will invite Deans to report on the implementation of measures to ensure that Aberdeen graduates have a minimum level of communication and information technology skills.
6. The UCTL will review advising arrangements in view of the considerable and increasing demands on Advisers of Studies.

6. Assisted by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the UCTL will monitor the use and understanding of the postgraduate structured management frameworks.
6. The Committee will investigate issues regarding student retention and will bring forward recommendations to improve retention figures.

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Category	Number of Undergraduate Students by Area of Study																							
	Arts & Soc Scis				Divinity				Law				Science				Engineering				Medicine			
	2000		1999		2000		1999		2000		1999		2000		1999		2000		1999		2000		1999	
Total No. of Students registered	3450 ¹		3479 ¹		79 ¹		96 ¹		573 ¹		570 ¹		2258 ¹		2329 ¹		416 ¹		451 ¹		959 ¹		968 ¹	
	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²	No	% ²
Students considered by SPC	231	6.7	215	6.2	8	10.1	10	10.4	16	2.8	13	2.3	101	4.5	94	4.0	31	7.5	27	6.0	33	3.4	22	2.3
Programme Year 1	116	3.4	103	3.0	4	5.1	7	7.3	8	1.4	10	1.8	40	1.8	32	1.4	8	1.9	10	2.2	14	1.5	11	1.1
Programme Year 2	86	2.5	88	2.5	3	7.8	2	2.1	6	1.0	2	0.4	47	2.1	50	2.1	15	3.6	12	2.7	3	0.3	4	0.9
Programme Year 3	28	0.8	24	0.7	1	1.3	1	1.0	2	0.3	1	0.2	13	0.6	12	0.5	7	1.7	1	0.2	6	0.6	2	0.4
Programme Year 4	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.2	4	0.9	6	0.6	4	0.9

Programme Year 5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	0.4	1	0.2
Permitted to proceed, repeat or transfer	125	3.6	123	3.5	4	5.1	6	6.3	7	1.2	3	0.5	52	2.3	51	2.2	21	5.0	13	2.9	20	2.1	15	3.3	
Discontinued ³	34	1.0	39	1.1	2	2.5	1	1.0	9	1.6	10	1.8	22	1.0	32	1.4	6	1.4	13	2.9	11	1.1	7	1.6	
Deemed to have Withdrawn ⁴ /Withdrawn	72	2.1	53	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	27	1.2	11	0.5	4	1.0	1	0.2	2	0.2	0	0.0	

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Appendix 1

Students' Progress Committees (SPC)

A summary of the SPC decisions for each of the six undergraduate Areas of Study is given below, together with comparative figures for 1999.

1. The total figures relate to the total number of full-time undergraduate students registered in each Area of Study during the relevant academic year.
2. The figures indicate the percentage of the total number of students in the relevant Area of Study.
3. Students whose studies are discontinued because of poor academic performance for which there is no, or no satisfactory, explanation.
4. Students who elected not to take their second half-session end of course examinations or their resit examinations, or who had been refused a Class Certificate in all their second half-session courses and who could not, therefore, fulfil the minimum progress requirements were "deemed to have withdrawn".

Category	No. of Students	
	1999/2000 ¹	1998/1999
1. Students who submitted a Withdrawal From Study form effective between the start of the Winter Term and before the end of the Summer Term	299 (44)	320
2. Students not "At Risk" but who submitted a Withdrawal From Study form effective between the last day of the Summer Term and the end of the Academic Year – includes transfers to other institutions (1999/2000 – 27; 1998/1999 – 19). [Note: Students who fail to satisfy the minimum progress requirements by the end of the Summer Term are flagged as "At Risk". All other continuing students are eligible to return to the University the following academic year, although a proportion will have insufficient credits to proceed to the next normal year of their programme - see 3 below]	103 (25)	148
3. Students who satisfied the minimum progress requirements but who had insufficient credits to proceed to the next normal year of their programme and who did not register at the start of the next academic year	48 (13)	42

4. Other students who satisfied the minimum progress requirements but who elected not to progress nor to withdraw formally and who were therefore "deemed to have withdrawn"	96 (16)	52
5. Students required to discontinue attendance on courses by the relevant Students' Progress Committee	68 ² (19)	102
6. Students "At Risk" [see 2 above] who either withdrew voluntarily or were deemed by the Students' Progress Committee to have withdrawn	115 (34)	79
TOTAL	729 (151)	743

Data in regard to the various categories of former full-time undergraduate students (excluding the Summer School for Access

¹ Figures in parentheses represent those eligible to be awarded an Undergraduate Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education.

² This figure is less than that reported to the Students' Progress Committees as it does not include part-time students or those subsequently re-admitted on appeal.

Appendix 2

Academic Appeals : 1998-2000

A summary of the outcome of academic appeals lodged in 1999/2000 and in 1998/99 is given below. Appeals lodged in one academic year may not be resolved until the year following.

Category	TOTAL		A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H		I	
	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99
Undergraduate	35	50	3	4	1	7	4	3	11	23	6	1	4	1	0	1*	1	0	6	0
Postgraduate	17	16	2	0	1	0	6	4	3	2	0	6	1	2	0	0	0	0	4	2
TOTAL	52	66	5	4	2	7	10	7	14	25	6	7	5	3	0	1	1	0	10	2

A = Not competent

B = Withdrawn

C = Upheld by Head of Department/Examiners.

D = Not upheld by Head of Department/Examiners: decision accepted by student.

E = Upheld by Senate Academic Appeals Committee.

F = Not upheld by Senate Academic Appeals Committee: decision accepted by student.

G = Upheld by University Court.

H = Not upheld by University Court.

I = Still in progress.

* Appeal upheld by Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee and referred back to examiners. Appeal to Court against decision of examiners following Senate Committee's hearing of the appeal.

Disciplinary Cases : 1998-2000

Category	Number of Students		Allegation Admitted or Found Proven		Allegation NOT Upheld	
	1999/2000	1998/1999	1999/2000	1998/1999	1999/2000	1998/1999
Undergraduate	29 ¹	18	29	16	2	2
Postgraduate	0	1	N/A	1	N/A	0
TOTAL	29 ¹	19	29	17	2	2

¹ Two students were each involved in two disciplinary cases

