

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 23 October 1998

Present: Professor IR Macdonald (Convener), Professor PR Duff, Dr JH Farrington, Professor DF Houlihan, Dr WF Long, Dr NLM Milne, Mr C O'Sullivan, Professor PA Racey, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr JG Roberts, Professor AA Rodger, Dr JG Simpson, Professor PJ Sloane, Dr IR Torrance and Professor DW Urwin with Ms P Chapman, Ms YS Gordon, Mr F Lovie, Mr JLA Madden, Dr PJ Murray, Mrs M Park and Dr T Webb (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Professor SD Logan, Mr D Welsh, Mr JA Forster and Mr G Pryor

MINUTES

139. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 1998.
(*Copy filed as UCTL/231098/128*)

ACADEMIC QUALITY AUDIT
(Minute 120 refers)

140. The Convener reported that a draft of the Academic Quality Audit Report had been received by the University, and a number of minor amendments made. As the draft was confidential it had not been circulated, but it was a very positive and helpful report. It was hoped that the QAA would provide the University with an electronic copy of the final report in due course so that it could be made available to all staff and students on the World-Wide Web.

REVIEW OF GRADE SPECTRUM
(Minute 122 refers)

- 141.1 The Committee considered the following papers:-

A: Analysis of First Degrees Awarded Between 1995-1998
B: The Effect of More Stringent Criteria for the Award of 2nd Class Honours Degrees
C: Review of External Examiners' Reports - 1996/97 and 1997/98
(*Copies filed as UCTL/231098/129*)

- 141.2 The Committee noted the following:-

(a) that Single Honours Degrees represented 81.7% of all degrees awarded between 1995 and 1998, and that the majority (71.8%) of Single Honours

Degrees were of two years' duration: consequently, the current Grade Spectrum had been applied only to one cohort (June 1998) of this category to date;

(b) that where External Examiners had commented specifically on the CAS and/or the *Grade Spectrum* in relation to standards, the majority of those for undergraduate programmes in 1997/98 had supported the application of the CAS and/or the *Grade Spectrum*;

(c) that the effect of the proposed more stringent criteria for the award of Second Class Honours Degrees was more pronounced as the number of elements of assessment that were applied to the *Grade Spectrum* increased.

141.3 The Committee agreed the following:-

(i) that further discussion on the *Grade Spectrum* be deferred until the October 1999 meeting of the UCTL, following analysis of the June 1999 results;

(ii) that the potentially dramatic impact on degrees that were based on a relatively high number of elements of assessment must be fully considered before more stringent criteria were approved;

(iii) that, ideally, one system of determining degree classification should be operated across the University;

(iv) that in view of (iii) above, those Departments not operating the *Grade Spectrum* (i.e. Chemistry and Engineering) be asked to produce the following:-

- details of their procedures for determining degree classification in June 1998 (which would have been provided to honours students in Departmental Honours handbooks);
- comparative data to indicate the effect of applying the University's *Grade Spectrum* to the results of candidates in June 1998 (and in June 1997 if readily available);
- justification as to why the Department should continue to be granted exemption from using the *Grade Spectrum*.

Action: Clerk

EXAMINERS' MEETINGS - JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMMES

(Minute 125 refers)

142.1 The Committee considered the comments made by Departments relating to the timing of External Examiners' meetings, and in particular those from the Department of Agriculture.

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/130)

142.2 The Committee noted that 14 Departments/degree co-ordinators had responded to the invitation to send details of any difficulties encountered in the June 1998 diet in regard to holding joint Examiners' meetings. Although

six had experienced some difficulties, with one exception (Agriculture) these Departments considered that the problems were not major and would not necessarily recur.

- 142.3 The Committee noted that the difficulties encountered by the Department of Agriculture appeared to result from the Department's policy of oralling all honours students. The Committee were unsure as to why the Department adopted this policy, as the usual practice was to oral only those candidates who were borderline. The Committee recommended that the Department adopt this practice, which would ease some of the difficulties it had experienced.
- 142.4 The Department of Agriculture also had considered that more time should be made available for marking. However, the Committee noted that Agriculture Honours course examinations were not always within the first week of the exam diet. It was agreed that the Department be reminded that they had the opportunity to comment on the draft examination timetable before it was finalised and that it should request that its honours courses be timetabled as early as possible, to allow more time for marking.
- 142.5 The Committee also agreed that the University could not require students to attend after the end of term e.g. for oral examinations and that the Department of Agriculture be informed accordingly.

Action: Clerk

PARTICIPATION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS IN ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES (Minute 126 refers)

- 143.1 The Committee had agreed previously that, following a request from the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee, a clear interpretation of the CVCP Code of Practice on the External Examiner System was required in regard to those scripts and information to be made available to External Examiners. In particular, clarification was required as to whether the Code of Practice should apply to ALL courses, irrespective of Level.
- 143.2 The Committee considered a draft revised wording of the relevant section (Section 8) of the CVCP Code of Practice on the External Examiner System.
- 143.3 The Committee agreed that the draft be amended in light of discussion and that the Convener should approve the revised wording on behalf of the Committee.

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/131a)

Action: Clerk

SUBJECT CENTRES TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- 144.1 The Committee considered a consultation paper, issued jointly by the four UK HE funding bodies, on recommendations from the Report of the Review of the

Computers in Teaching Initiative and the Teaching and Learning Technology Support Network. The funding bodies wished to consult the Sector on the Report's key proposals to establish Subject Centres for Learning and Teaching; a Generic Technology Centre; and a Central Management Unit. The paper had been sent to Heads of Department for comment.

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/132)

144.2 The Committee agreed that members should submit comments in writing to the Clerk by 4 November 1998, to include details of any subjects omitted from the proposed list. A number of general points were made, as follows:-

- (i) that it was important that a number of the proposed subject centres were located in Scotland;
- (ii) that the 'Distributed Centre' model may be the preferred option for large subject groupings;
- (iii) that the Centres should not just consider campus-based delivery, but also distance learning.

Action: All/Clerk

EXAMINATION DIETS AND THE RETURN OF RESULTS

145.1 The Committee considered a paper concerning the August examination diet.

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/133)

145.2 The Committee agreed to recommend the following to the Senate:-

- (i) that the diet should commence on Saturday 7 August 1999 (one week earlier than in previous years)
- (ii) that the last examination should be held on or before Friday 20 August 1999 (one week earlier than in previous years)
- (iii) that the latest date for the return of examination results be Wednesday 1 September 1999 (2 days earlier than in previous years)

Action: Clerk

145.3 The Committee also agreed that the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) be asked to recommend to the Senate the latest date for the return of results of Level 5 postgraduate courses which were examined in the Summer (e.g. project/dissertation courses) and of postgraduate taught programmes. It was stressed, however, that the final date should not be allowed to 'drift' too far beyond the end of the 50-week programmes.

Action: ASC(PG)

CAS GENERAL PRINCIPLES

(Minute 111.2 refers)

146.1 The Committee noted that, in response to the revised "Notes and CAS General Principles" which had been approved by the Committee on 29 May 1998 and

reiterated to Departments, examiners and students, two Heads of Department had expressed concern that CAS marks might not be averaged or rounded-up.

- 146.2 One Department had indicated that European universities routinely recorded marks with decimal points on degree transcripts and had asked whether the University should consider this also.
- 146.3 The Committee agreed that no change be made to the CAS General Principles (as revised by the UCTL on 29 May 1998) and that the issues identified above be addressed in guidance notes on assessment procedures which would be submitted to the Committee for approval in due course.

Action: Clerk

PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

- 147.1 At the meeting of the UCTL in May 1998, it had been agreed that the Centre for Learning and Professional Development would present a paper to the next meeting setting out guidelines for the Peer Observation of Teaching.
- 147.2 The Committee agreed that the production of this paper be delayed to enable it to take account of emerging proposals in the University for the accreditation of new lecturers and of procedures being developed to enable those seeking promotion on the grounds of teaching to document their expertise. This would also enable the University to take full advantage of the experience and expertise of Ruth Grant, a newly appointed member of staff of the CLPD, who was a joint author of an authoritative new guide to the subject [Day, K, Grant R, Hounsell D 1998 *Reviewing your Teaching*, Centre for Teaching Learning and Assessment in association with the Universities' and Colleges' Staff Development Agency].
- 147.3 A progress report on these related issues would be presented to the next meeting.

Action: JAF

SHEFC TQA REPORTS: 1998

148. The Committee considered a paper summarising Assessors' comments and general issues which had arisen from the 1998 TQA Reports of three of the University's cognate areas and agreed that the paper be sent to Heads of Department for consideration.

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/134)

Action: Clerk

REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP: 1998/99

149. The Committee noted the above.

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/135)

LENGTH OF VALIDITY OF CLASS CERTIFICATES

(Minute 121 refers)

150. The Committee noted that the Senate (17 June 1998) had approved the recommendation that the period of validity of Class Certificates awarded in session 1999-2000 and thereafter be the session in which they were awarded, plus the following session; and that General Regulation 7 for First Degrees be revised accordingly.

Action: Clerk

STUDENTS ENTERING WITH ADVANCED STANDING

(Minute 129 refers)

- 151.1 The Committee considered a paper on the above, which indicated the distribution of direct entrants across the University's degree areas this session.
(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/136)

- 151.2 The Committee noted the following:-

(a) that, as requested by the UCTL, the Director of the Centre for Learning & Professional Development and the President of the SRC had written to all Heads of Department with suggestions as to how they might help students entering with Advanced Standing to integrate with the other students in their year;

(b) that all students entering with Advanced Standing in September 1998 had been invited to attend two lectures on Learning Strategies and Computing Skills and one lecture on Information Skills during weeks 0 and 1, and that details of these academic skills lectures had been sent to all Advisers of Studies, for information;

(c) that the Assistant Secretary (Admissions) had sent all relevant Heads of Department a list of students admitted in September 1998 with Advanced Standing who had expressed an Honours intention in their subject, as summarised on the paper.

- 151.3 The Committee requested that the information given in the paper also be produced for the 1997/98 session.

Action: Clerk

REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR SYSTEM

(Minute 132 refers)

152. The Committee noted that meetings of the modularisation Working Party had been scheduled for 14 October, 9 November and 7 December 1998, with a view to submitting a report to the Committee on 5 February 1999.

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM (SCEF) PRODUCTION

- 153.1 The Committee noted that the DISS had offered several training courses in late August/early September and one in early October in preparation for Departments assuming responsibility, from 1 September 1998, for the production of the master Student Course Evaluation Forms: this would enable

Departments to produce forms tailored for individual courses as and when they required them. Scanning of the forms and production of the initial report would continue to be carried out by DISS.

- 153.2 Only two Departments which used the undergraduate SCEF had failed to send a representative on a training course: they had been sent the course notes and details of how to load the software from the Internet, and they had been given a contact name in DISS in case they experienced any difficulties in producing the master forms.

“ELEMENTS OF ASSESSMENT” AND THE *GRADE SPECTRUM*

154. The Committee noted that, following a request from the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee in response to a recent case, all Heads of Department would be asked to ensure that their documentation to students clearly identified all “elements of assessment” and their percentage contribution to the final degree classification when applied to the *Grade Spectrum*. Also, where a course (e.g. a project course) was divided into more than one “element of assessment” in terms of the *Grade Spectrum*, it must be made explicit to students that the CAS marks for the individual “elements” (which would not be released to students) would be applied to the *Grade Spectrum* rather than the overall CAS mark for the course. Where the result of a summative assessment (e.g. a General Paper) was to be used in determining the degree classification, students should be made aware that the CAS mark for this “element of assessment” would not be released as it would not form part of the assessment of an individual course.

Action: Clerk

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS ADMITTED VIA ACCESS PROGRAMMES

- 155.1 The Committee considered a paper on support from students admitted via Access Programmes which had emanated following discussion at the Students’ Progress Committee of the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Science).

(Copy filed as UCTL/231098/137)

- 155.2 The Committee agreed that the progression of students entering via Access/Summer School be considered as part of a general review of the provision of study skills. It was suggested that the review consider conducting a questionnaire survey of Access/Summer School students, to determine whether they experienced difficulties in making the transition and, if so, what these difficulties were.

QAA FRAMEWORK FOR UK QUALITY ASSURANCE

156. The Committee noted that the QAA’s fourth bulletin *Higher Quality* had been published recently which set out the new quality assurance framework that the Agency would develop and implement. Copies of the document would be circulated to members of the Committee when they were available.

Action: Clerk

NEXT MEETING

157. The next meeting would be held on Friday 11 December 1998 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2.

TW/LG

9.11.98 UCTLMeet3/minoct98

Appendix 1:

UCTL/231098/131a

University Committee on Teaching and Learning

Participation of External Examiners in Assessment Procedures

Following a request from the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee for clarification of the University's policy in regard to identifying those examination scripts which should be sent routinely to External Examiners, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) agreed that a clear interpretation of the CVCP Code of Practice on the External Examiner System was required in regard to those scripts and information to be made available to External Examiners. In particular, clarification was required as to whether the Code of Practice should apply to ALL courses, irrespective of Level.

The following revised wording of Section 8 of the Code of Practice was approved by the UCTL on 23 October 1998. Additions are given in *bold italics*.

Extract from Appendix 9.1 of the Academic Quality Handbook

8. Participation in Assessment Procedures

Since an External Examiner is required to approve a candidate's overall Common Assessment Scale (CAS) mark for each individual course, irrespective of Level, the following procedures are applicable to ALL undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses i.e. Levels 1-5.

Approval of draft examination papers

- 8.1 All draft degree examination papers should be sent to an External Examiner for approval: ***this includes all written examination papers, the marks for which contribute either to the overall CAS mark for a course, irrespective of Level, or, in the case of non-modularised postgraduate taught programmes, to the overall programme result.*** In appropriate cases External Examiners may be expected to set some questions or complete papers.
- 8.2 In some subjects it may be essential for model answers to be prepared and scrutinised.

Assessment of examination scripts

A script in paragraphs 8.3 - 8.12 below is defined as the totality of a candidate's answers to a written examination paper i.e. the answers to the required number of questions per paper.

- 8.3 An External Examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts.
- 8.4 In those cases where it is agreed with the External Examiner that the inviting department should make a selection of scripts to be sent to the External Examiner, the principles for such selection should be agreed with the External Examiner in advance.
- 8.5 The guiding principle for any selection of scripts is that External Examiners should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.
- 8.6 External Examiners should see a sample of scripts from the top, middle and the bottom of the range. They should normally be sent all scripts of borderline candidates. They should also see all scripts assessed internally as first class or as failures (***see paragraph 8.8 below***).

Assessment of projects and other work

- 8.7 An External Examiner should have the right to see any work that contributes to the assessment and the degree classification. In some cases it may be agreed that the department should make a selection of such work to be sent to the External Examiner, the principles for such selection ***and the timing as to when it should be sent*** being agreed in advance (***see paragraph 8.8 below***).

Selection of scripts and other work to be sent/made available to the External Examiner

- 8.8 ***In regard to paragraphs 8.4, 8.5 and 8.6, it is important that External Examiners are able to satisfy themselves that the boundaries between Pass and Fail and between each CAS band have been set at the appropriate standard. Consequently, each candidate's scripts and any in-course/continuous assessment work (including project/dissertation/thesis work) either should be sent to the External Examiner or should be made***

available to the External Examiner where he/she prefers to review candidates' work while visiting the University, for the following:-

Courses and summative assessments (e.g. general or language papers) which are part of an Honours or postgraduate taught programme

- *those for which the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 18-20*
- *those for which the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 6-8*
- *a selection of those for which the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 9-11, 12-14 and 15-17*
- *those for which the internal markers have been unable to agree an overall CAS mark*

All other courses

- *those for which the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 6-8*
- *a selection of those for which the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 9-20*
- *those for which the internal markers have been unable to agree an overall CAS mark*

8.9 *Notwithstanding paragraph 8.8, for all Honours and postgraduate taught courses each candidate's continuous and in-course assessment work (including project/ dissertation/thesis work) should be made available to the External Examiner on request.*

Medical and other evidence relating to a candidate's performance

8.10 *If candidates believe that illness and/or other personal circumstances may have affected their performance in an element of assessment they must submit written details to the Head of the relevant Department no later than one week after the date on which they submitted or appeared for the assessment concerned, to allow these to be taken into consideration by the internal markers. Heads of Department should send these details of medical or other extenuating circumstances to the External Examiner with candidates' scripts and any in-course/continuous assessment work in each of the following cases:-*

- *for all courses where the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 0-8, irrespective of Level*
- *for all courses taken as part of an Honours programme where the internal markers have agreed an overall CAS mark of 11, 14 or 17*

Approval of Marks

8.11 *The results (i.e. Achieved or Not Achieved) of courses assessed at the end of the first half-session must be approved by an External Examiner in*

January/February and are final (with one exception - see below), irrespective of Level. However, the CAS marks for courses that constitute part of an Honours or postgraduate taught programme are provisional - they can be raised or lowered at the final Examiners' meeting later in the session (with one exception). The exceptions are that CAS 8 (Not Achieved) may be changed at the final Examiners' meeting to CAS 9 or above (Achieved), but CAS 9 can NOT be changed to CAS 8 or lower.

- 8.12** *For Honours programmes of two years' duration, the CAS marks for courses taken in Year 3 can NOT be modified at the end of Year 4 - they are regarded as having been signed-off in Year 3 by the External Examiner in office at that time (who may not be in post when a candidate reaches the end of his/her programme). However, the External Examiner in office at the end of the Honours programme may request that a candidate's scripts and in-course/ continuous assessments taken in Year 3 be made available at the end of Year 4 to assist the Examiners in determining the final degree classification: this may be particularly the case where the Examiners wish to use their discretion in departing from the classification indicated by the Grade Spectrum.*

Appendix 2:

UCTL/231098/134

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

SHEFC TQA Reports: 1998

Assessors' comments and general issues arising from the 1998 TQA Reports of three of the University's cognate areas are summarised overleaf. They are categorised into the six aspects of the SHEFC TQA framework and describe good practice and areas for possible improvement. The UCTL has identified several themes from the TQA Reports, which are listed below.

Heads of Department are asked to consider these themes in regard to their teaching and learning provision. Cross-referencing to relevant paragraph numbers of the summary is provided to assist Departments in addressing the various themes.

RECRUITMENT/ACCESS/WORK ABROAD/EMPLOYER LIAISON

[see paragraphs A.1, A.2, A.4, A.18, C.1-C.4 and D.12-D.13, but see A.21]

PLACEMENTS/STUDY

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

[see paragraphs A.7-A.16 and C.9, but see A.19, A.22-A.23, C.13-C.15 and C.17]

COURSE CONTENT/TEACHING METHODS/DELIVERY

[see paragraphs A.5-A.6, B.1-B.9 and E.1, but see A.20, A.24, A.27, B.18-B.20 and C.11-C.12]

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES/FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS

[see paragraphs B.10-B.17, C.8 and C.10, but see A.25-A.26 and B.21-B.26]

INDUCTION/ADVISING/DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT, INCLUDING DOCUMENTATION

[see paragraphs A.3, D.1-D.11, D.17-D.18 and D.24, but see D.26-D.27]

CAREERS GUIDANCE/EMPLOYMENT

[see paragraphs C.6 and D.20-D.24, but see C.16]

DEPARTMENTAL FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

[see paragraphs E.1-E.5 and E.16-E.21, but see E.22 and E.24-E.26]

COURSE & PROGRAMME REVIEW/FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

[see paragraphs F.1-F.4 and F.6-F.15, but see F.23-F.24 and F.26-F.28]

STAFF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

[see paragraphs F.16-F.21, but see F.29-F.30]

c/tw/tqa9798

SUMMARY OF SHEFC TQA REPORTS : 1998

A: CURRICULUM DESIGN, CONTENT AND ORGANISATION

Good Practice:

- A.1 The inclusion of site visits and field trips on all programmes, which students commended.
- A.2 The steps to ensure that a period of residence abroad became a more fully integrated part of a student's programme.
- A.3 There is a wide range of well-produced leaflets and handbooks available for students which make clear the structure and aims of the curriculum.
- A.4 There are commendable efforts to involve employers in the curriculum design, through an External Liaison Committee with a wide membership including professionals, and by means of a programme of visits by students to various work places.
- A.5 The considerable extent to which teaching at Levels 3, 4 and 5 is underpinned by staff research, which students appreciate.
- A.6 Honours-level courses reflect the research interests of members of staff.
- A.7 The provision in all programmes for the development of a range of transferable skills, including numeracy, computing skills, the ability to search for, retrieve and use information, and to engage in critical evaluation, work in teams and present work orally and in writing (but see A.22 below).
- A.8 The design and organisation of the curriculum enable students to develop proficiency as well as communicative and transferable skills that contribute towards their employability. Transferable skills are specifically identified among the learning outcomes articulated in course materials, and these materials also offer helpful guidance on independent learning.
- A.9 Degree programmes are notable for the integration of IT.
- A.10 Teaching aims are clearly expressed, and reflect the University's mission. They include the development of subject-specific, professional and general transferable skills.

- A.11 The Department clearly recognises the need to develop transferable skills, particularly those relating to the use of Information Technology.
- A.12 There is an explicit, documented expectation that students would be able, at a minimum, to make use of work-processing software in order to operate effectively within the Department.
- A.13 Computer-based practicals are used effectively to develop skills in using statistics software packages.
- A.14 The organisation of the curriculum in such a way to encourage students to become independent learners.
- A.15 The progressive emphasis on independent learning (in the postgraduate programme by this Department) (but see A.23 below).
- A.16 Students are encouraged to develop a critical approach to key cultural issues rather than to accumulate knowledge.
- A.17 The University's modular structure which facilitates the study of subjects in a wide variety of contexts.
- A.18 The provision offers flexible entry points at a range of levels and students can exit from programmes at a variety of stages with appropriate standards of achievement.

Areas for possible improvement:

- A.19 Programmes do not provide sufficiently for the development of students' understanding of the social and political context in which decisions and policies are framed in regard to aspects of the Department's provision.
- A.20 Some first- and second-year course evaluations indicate that a proportion of students have not found the courses interesting.
- A.21 There is little opportunity within the curriculum to acquire direct professional experience.
- A.22 The Department does not appear to have developed a clear strategy for the systematic development of transferable skills. Several modules offer undergraduates little opportunity to develop their presentational skills.
- A.23 Postgraduate taught students' opportunity for independent learning appears to be limited by including a substantial amount of directed reading.
- A.24 Some courses are studied jointly by Level 3 and 4 students, giving rise to concern about academic progression in the honours programmes.
- A.25 The dissertation is submitted at the beginning of the final honours year, which the Assessors believe is not the appropriate location for a piece of work described to students as a culmination of their honours programme.
- A.26 Assessors expressed some reservations about the rationale behind the differing requirements and credit-ratings for the dissertation between two related Departments, and between joint and single honours dissertations in one Department.
- A.27 Assessors found that while many courses were up-to-date, there were also examples where recent developments were not fully reflected.

B: TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Good practice:

- B.1 Most teaching is excellent (in one cognate area): almost all classes observed were characterised by careful planning in relation to the intended learning outcomes, the use of up-to-date and relevant material, including topical examples, appropriate pacing, the effective use of overhead projectors and good rapport between staff and students. Of 21 teaching sessions observed (in another cognate area) 48% were found to be of the highest quality (see B.18 and B.19 below).
- B.2 Assessors identified many excellent qualities in the teaching they observed, including excellent rapport between staff and students, effective planning and preparation by both, and content informed by the specialist expertise of tutors. Pace and methods were varied appropriately in relation to the objectives of the class, the level of challenge was well judged and much use was made of relevant examples (but see B.19 below).
- B.3 Subject staff employ a mixture of innovative and traditional methods which promote both mediated and independent learning.
- B.4 Students reported that the quality of the teaching was very high and confirmed that they experienced a variety of methods in class.

- B.5 Teaching methods employed at Levels 1 and 2 are often innovative and an effective response to the needs of large classes. The approach adopted at Level 3 also involves a mixture of teaching methodologies (but see B.26 below).
- B.6 There were examples of high standards of teaching and learning at Level 4, reflected in dissertations and essays (but see B.20 below).
- B.7 Students at Levels 3 and 4 enjoyed being taught together (but see A.24 above).
- B.8 Assessors were impressed by the extent to which students were encouraged to manage their own learning through well-designed independent learning tasks.
- B.9 Courses are organised through a clearly defined system of Year and Course Conveners, reporting to Vertical Committees, a Teaching Committee, a Staff Committee and the Head of Department. This system is understood by students and their views are represented at appropriate points.
- B.10 The Department's attempts to return all work within four weeks, with feedback, in some cases on a standard *pro forma* is commendable (but see B.23 below).
- B.11 A well-articulated University Common Assessment Scale; clear criteria for marking papers and arriving at degree classifications; double-marking of Level 3 and Level 4 work, with examinations being marked anonymously (but see B.24 below).
- B.12 The University's Common Assessment Scale for grading is explicit and consistent (but see B.27 below). The Assessors noted that the Department was considering making use of its own marking scale prior to conversion to the CAS.
- B.13 Assessment is used both as a learning aid and as a means of judging performance, and relates very well to intended learning outcomes, including those relating to independent learning.
- B.14 Students are generally provided with explicit assessment criteria. Work is returned very promptly, and individual oral feedback is invariably available and much appreciated by students (but see B.25 below).
- B.15 Assessment schemes at Levels 1 and 2 are well documented and implemented. A good range of assessment methods are employed at these early levels.
- B.16 A highly commendable system of providing general feedback on coursework via the University's computer network is working well, and is much appreciated by students.
- B.17 Delays in the return of marked coursework have been significantly reduced, also as a result of documented concerns expressed by students.

Areas for possible improvement:

- B.18 There is some scope for improvement in 8% and 38% of classes observed in two cognate areas, with room for significant improvement in a further 8% and 14% of classes observed, respectively.
- B.19 In the less successful sessions, problems included poor time management leading to failure to achieve set objectives. In particular, the level of student participation was occasionally disappointing, sometimes as a result of poor room arrangements or a lack of appropriate technique on the part of a tutor.
- B.20 Teaching methods at Level 4 are predominantly traditional, with a significant proportion of formal presentations.
- B.21 Many of the questions in the "summative examination" at the end of the postgraduate taught programme call for specialist understanding rather than an integrative approach.
- B.22 There may be scope for a wider selection of assessment methods, including the further use of multiple-choice questions, especially for first-year work.

- B.23 The Department's aspirations in regard to feedback (see B.10 above) have not always been fulfilled and Assessors noted some examples of brief and general feedback.
- B.24 Assessors noted instances of inconsistent and over-generous marking in a few modules (in spite of B.11 above).
- B.25 Assessors considered that written feedback is variable in quality, and that the identification of errors in student work could have been more consistent.
- B.26 There were some examples of courses at Levels 3 and 4 which in the Assessors' opinion were more appropriate to lower levels. The Assessors also considered that in some cases students appeared to be able to gain high marks by re-capitulation of taught material.
- B.27 It was not possible to establish the basis for the use of nine separate grades of failure on the CAS, and External Examiners had commented on problems associated with the Scale. *[UCTL*

commentary - The External Examiners' comments were considered by the Committee's review of the CAS in May 1998.]

C: STUDENT PROGRESSION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Good practice:

- C.1 Undergraduate and postgraduate students indicated that they were attracted by the vocational nature of the programmes and the high reputation of the Department.
- C.2 The Department is addressing pro-actively its concern at the downward trend in the numbers of students by co-operating with the Student Recruitment Services on schools liaison activities, and examining how its programmes may be adapted to cater for a changing situation at secondary level.
- C.3 There is a strong institutional commitment to wider access, with many mature students being admitted. Access programmes are offered, including a distance-learning option for students from remote Scottish communities and a Summer School for those who had been educationally disadvantaged. Results of the first cohort of these students to graduate, in 1997, showed 58% achieving First or Second Class Honours degrees.
- C.4 The Department offered an innovative Level 1 programme delivered in the evening by video-link, which permitted progression into honours.
- C.5 Students expressed very favourable views of their learning experience, and were unanimously positive about all aspects of their education.
- C.6 Most students find employment after graduation, and employers indicate that the best graduates are knowledgeable, competent in IT, articulate and work well with others (but see C.14 below).
- C.7 External Examiners had indicated that the standard of awards was comparable to that in other universities.
- C.8 External Examiners' Reports indicated that aims and objectives were generally being met. This perception was shared by the Assessors.
- C.9 Students demonstrated an impressive range of inter-personal skills both in class and in conversation with Assessors (but see C.14 below).
- C.10 In general, coursework is appropriately chosen, and assessed both specific and transferable skills. A sound grasp of basic knowledge and fundamental principles is clearly demonstrated by students' work.

Areas for possible improvement:

- C.11 A large proportion of (undergraduate) students only achieve a modest understanding of some key areas of the curriculum. In particular, many students fail at the first attempt, or achieve poor results, in a number of first- and second-year foundation modules. Assessors also noted that many third-year students achieved only marginal passes (in a particular course).
- C.12 Some students' presentations and dissertations fail to demonstrate a holistic understanding of fundamental aspects of this particular degree programme.
- C.13 Assessors found only limited evidence to suggest that postgraduate taught students became independent learners and noted a long tail of poorer postgraduate performances, inferior to the best of those on the (related) undergraduate honours programme.
- C.14 Those graduates who met Assessors showed little appreciation of how their studies might have equipped them with transferable skills or to undertake life-long learning (in spite of C.6 above).
- C.15 Levels of critical understanding are variable.
- C.16 The claims that Aberdeen graduates competed well in the job market are not entirely supported by the First Destination data supplied.
- C.17 The Assessors considered that the level of attainment expected at Level 4 is not always sufficiently challenging for a single Honours degree, particularly in respect of autonomous learning and independent critical thinking.

D: STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Good practice:

- D.1 The induction course in the first week of the session, which introduces students to the Department and to University life, is effective (but see D.24 below).
- D.2 The University's admission and induction arrangements are effective and thorough; students particularly appreciate the opportunity to visit the institution on an individual basis at an early stage in the applications process and to meet students and academic staff.
- D.3 The Department provides appropriate and effective guidance for students during their programmes.
- D.4 Students praised the help they received from Advisers; although regular scheduled meetings are infrequent, students experience no difficulty in obtaining appointments.
- D.5 Secretarial staff in the Department, one of whom has been trained in counselling, also provide students with advice.
- D.6 Students commended the enthusiasm, approachability and availability of academic staff, and the support offered by clerical staff.
- D.7 Excellent relations exist between students and the staff, who are regarded as approachable, friendly and helpful. Although an "office hours" system is in operation, students feel free to approach staff with problems at any time, and consider that they are very well supported both academically and pastorally.
- D.8 Amongst all categories of staff there is clear evidence of concern for the well-being and guidance of students.
- D.9 Student support and guidance is achieved as much through the extensive informal contacts which exist with Departmental staff, as by the Department's formal procedures.
- D.10 The Department provides remedial tutorials following the admission of some students through Clearing. Extra tuition is provided for some postgraduate taught students.
- D.11 The University provides a wide range of effective student services and there is effective liaison between these and the Department.
- D.12 The Department has maintained a range of professional contacts. Its Marketing Officer provides a register of firms willing to take students for vacation placement work. Undergraduate students are encouraged to take placements and most of those who wish obtain a placement.
- D.13 Support for study abroad has been improved. Preparation is provided through a series of meetings during which students have the opportunity to discuss the experience with those in upper years, a Handbook, and an excellent guide on the Web. Visits are organised whenever possible.
- D.14 The University's central support services are comprehensive and effective.
- D.15 Wardens and Sub-Wardens are well integrated into the pastoral care system.
- D.16 Well-structured support is offered to international and mature students and those with disabilities.
- D.17 Curricula provision for students with special needs, including problems of physical mobility, is as strong as possible given the constraints of the site.
- D.18 Good provision is made for the support of students with the attribution of dyslexia.
- D.19 The Assessors were impressed by the clear guidance which is given to prospective students with disabilities.
- D.20 Students are provided with effective careers advice. The University Careers Advisory Service works closely with the Department.
- D.21 Students appreciate the support offered by the University Careers Service, which is viewed as helpful and readily accessible, providing advice and assistance with applications.
- D.22 Departmental Student Careers Representatives maintain close liaison with the Careers Service, disseminate information and good practice among their fellow-students and are members of an Employers' Liaison Group which focuses on improving employability.
- D.23 The Careers Service is closely involved with the Department, and well-informed as to the needs of the Department's graduates.
- D.24 The systems for student support are good, with good liaison between the Department and central facilities. There is very good documentation for students, and an impressive integrated health and personal counselling service. The Careers Service is closely linked to the Department, and is well-informed about the needs of the Department's graduates.

Areas for possible improvement:

- D.25 Assessors were surprised that the University does not provide tours of its main library, the Queen Mother Library, for first-year students. *[DISS Commentary - Library tours were offered to all first-year students on a voluntary basis for many years but were stopped when numbers attending dropped to a handful or none at all. Guidance on the configuration of QML is widely available to students in most subjects in a classroom setting, supported by a self-paced CAL package. A supplementary physical tour is provided for the minority of students who ask for one. In response to feedback from the Academic Skills course, voluntary tours will again be on offer in 1998/99. Our practice conforms to that favoured by most academic libraries with a serious commitment to user-instruction.]*
- D.26 Each student receives a handbook, but module outlines are only available on computer or in the library or Departmental Office.
- D.27 Although students receive all necessary academic guidance in a written form, there is some fragmentation of sources of information. Some material is relatively new, and the Departments may wish to consolidate on the basis of best practice.
- D.28 Students stated that there could be lengthy waiting times before they were able to meet with their designated academic counsellor (Adviser of Studies).

E: LEARNING RESOURCES

Good practice:

- E.1 The environment is highly conducive to learning. Most staff members are active in research, and there are examples of specialist research facilities being employed to extend and deepen student experience.
- E.2 There is a very high standard of provision of all types of learning resources.
- E.3 Students appreciate the use that is made of visiting lecturers, especially practitioners.
- E.4 Library resources to support the programmes are substantial.
- E.5 The Department has been allocated a generous library budget.
- E.6 Students enjoy access to a range of specialist services in the library, including photocopying and binding, and to meeting rooms where group work may be carried out.
- E.7 The Queen Mother Library operates an effective system for managing the demand for its stock (but see E.22 below).
- E.8 Although students' evaluations reveal some discontent with library facilities, Assessors considered that the library is well stocked and provides good support for the full range of courses offered.
- E.9 Library staff provide high-quality induction and training services to all students and Honours-level students received specialist support, which is particularly helpful for those writing dissertations (but see E.23 below).
- E.10 Library opening hours are extensive.
- E.11 The library is very well resourced and has exceptionally good extended access hours (but see E.24 below).
- E.12 The University is the principal provider and maintainer of computing facilities and liaises effectively with the Department.
- E.13 Students indicated that the computing facilities are adequate at most times of the year.
- E.14 Students experience few difficulties in accessing computing facilities at various sites on campus.
- E.15 Students obtain instruction in the use of the Internet and use it regularly as a source in the preparation of papers and assignments.
- E.16 Specialist equipment is plentiful and effectively deployed. The provision of IT hardware and software at both Departmental and central levels is impressive.
- E.17 There is a well-planned forward programme for maintaining and upgrading equipment.
- E.18 Teaching accommodation is appropriate to the delivery of the curriculum.
- E.19 The Department's accommodation is in good decorative order, with effective noticeboards and attractive illustrations of Departmental work. There are dedicated rooms for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, providing space for group working and private study (but see E.25 below).

- E.20 There is a high standard of provision of small rooms for student research. There is a very impressive provision of computers for student use. Access to Departmental computer facilities is restricted to normal working hours, although there is 24-hour access elsewhere on the campus.
- E.21 In general the standard of maintenance and decor is high.

Areas for possible improvement:

- E.22 Students have complained about shortages of material in connection with some modules, and failures to place heavily-used material on short-loan. Assessors noted that the Department was addressing these matters.
- E.23 Students expressed some concern about the adequacy of library facilities during particularly busy periods of the academic year.
- E.24 There is a policy of not stocking copies of the first-year textbook (in regard to this Department's particular courses) in order to encourage student purchase. It is not clear whether the potentially disadvantageous effects of this policy for some students are being monitored (see E.11 above).
- E.25 Postgraduate taught students suggested that they needed a larger room.
- E.26 Teaching rooms vary in quality, and some are inappropriate for their purpose. However, the University has established a task force to review the situation.
- E.27 Central timetabling results in occasional inappropriate allocation of rooms, but this is not a common occurrence.

F: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

Good practice:

- F.1 There is a clearly defined structure for the approval and modification of programmes and modules, involving approval by a hierarchy of programme, Departmental, Faculty and University committees. These committees are also responsible for the regular review of programmes, taking into account the views of students and External Examiners. Student opinion is canvassed regularly.
- F.2 The University is in the process of introducing substantial changes to its quality assurance procedures, which may help to resolve some of the problems identified by Assessors. The current system works very well at the level of the individual course, where Departmental consideration of student and External Examiner opinion leads regularly to appropriate action (but see F.28 below).
- F.3 There is a programme of curricular review through Year Committees, Vertical Review Committees and a Teaching Committee, ultimately responsible to the Head of Department. The Vertical Review Committees are monitoring the development of the main sub-areas of the discipline, and there is documentary evidence of the extent of their influence on curriculum design and delivery.
- F.4 The University operates a consistent, effective and rigorous system of quality control, at Departmental, Faculty and institutional levels. A range of performance indicators is analysed and used for documented action (but see F.24 below).
- F.5 There is a clear process of review of institutional quality control procedures, which has recently led to the creation of new Academic Standards Committees with cross-Faculty responsibilities.
- F.6 The documentation of procedures is in all respects exemplary.
- F.7 Assessors noted several instances of effective response by the Department to students' views (but see F.26 below).
- F.8 Students informed Assessors that staff are very willing to act quickly in response to short-term difficulties.
- F.9 Students are content that their views are regularly solicited and acted upon.
- F.10 Staff-Student Consultative Committees deal rapidly and effectively with problems.
- F.11 The Student Course Evaluation Forms are regarded as useful, and will be more fully integrated into other aspects of review in future.
- F.12 The Department's processes includes a number of mechanisms for completing the feedback loop.

- F.13 The Department has reviewed some modules in which the performance of (undergraduate) students had been poor, and has taken action (but see F.27 below).
- F.14 The Department has responded effectively to student complaints about the low quality of some teaching by staff from outwith the Department and by teaching assistants.
- F.15 External Examiners' Reports are dealt with effectively at Departmental, Faculty and University level (but see F.25 below).
- F.16 Procedures for the training and monitoring of staff are effective, with new staff being enrolled on courses in the University's Centre for Learning & Professional Development.
- F.17 Staff in the Department have taken a large number of the courses designed to enhance their teaching.
- F.18 The Department has introduced an informal system of peer observation of teaching.
- F.19 New full-time members of staff and teaching assistants are carefully mentored.
- F.20 A system of peer observation of teaching has recently come into operation for all members of staff.
- F.21 The Head of Department carries out review of teaching performance based on a range of evidence including feedback from student questionnaires, and there is evidence of remedial action having been taken (but see F.29 and F.30 below).

- F.22 The self-assessment document is bland and descriptive. It does not provide a sustained critical evaluation of provision, and thereby fails to indicate the rapid and effective progress made in the recent past.

Areas for possible improvement:

- F.23 The student course evaluation form is poorly designed to elicit appropriate feedback about several of the Department's modules. The Department is considering how it might be improved. *[UCTL commentary: the delivery of the relevant software (SNAP) to Departments during the summer of 1998 will allow Departments to readily modify Part B of the SCEF for individual courses.]*
- F.24 Rates of return of student feedback questionnaires are low, and Assessors established that the Department's experience was typical of the Faculty as a whole. There are grounds for doubting the validity of this particular source of data, for the range of actions which are based on it. *[UCTL commentary: SCEF response rates are monitored by Deans and Academic Standards Committees. Departments are asked to indicate the steps taken to improve response rates <75%.]*
- F.25 The External Examiner's Report Form has limitations, and is currently under review by the University. *[UCTL commentary: a revised form was introduced for the May/June 1998 diet, which asked External Examiners to submit an annual report in addition to a full report at the end of their tenure.]*
- F.26 Responses to student evaluations suggest that the Department did not anticipate the likely effects of some recent changes in the Department's main undergraduate programme on the quality of teaching or the availability of library resources.
- F.27 The Department has failed to review some courses in which performance has been poor.
- F.28 There is at the moment no systematic annual review of the whole student experience within particular programmes. Periodic reviews took place every five years, but review panels did not currently include members from outwith the University, and findings remain confidential. *[UCTL commentary: the UCTL, in 1997, considered the merits of including a subject specialist from outwith the University on Internal Teaching Review Panels but deferred a decision pending the outcome of the UK discussions on future arrangements for external quality assurance.]*
- F.29 In general, staff development activity is largely confined to non-academic and probationary academic staff.
- F.30 Teaching excellence is a key element in the documented institutional process of promotion. Evidence of this being applied within the Department is sparse.

