

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 1999

- Present:** Professor IR Macdonald (Convener), Professor PR Duff, Dr JH Farrington, Dr WF Long, Mr C O'Sullivan, Professor PA Racey, Dr JG Roberts, Professor AA Rodger, Dr JG Simpson, Professor PJ Sloane, Dr IR Torrance, Professor DW Urwin with Ms YS Gordon, Ms R Grant (*vice* Mr Forster), Dr G Mackintosh, Mr JLA Madden, Dr PJ Murray and Dr T Webb (Clerk) in attendance.
- Apologies:** Professor DF Houlihan, Professor SD Logan, Dr NLM Milne, Professor LD Ritchie, Mr D Welsh, Mr JA Forster, Mr F Lovie, and Mr G Pryor.

MINUTES

168. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 1998.
(copy filed as UCTL/050299/142)

**STUDENTS WORK AFFECTED BY THEIR UNDERTAKING
PAID EMPLOYMENT
(Minute 161.2 refers)**

- 169.1 The Committee, on 11 December 1998, considered a request from the Department of Zoology, which had been referred by the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine), concerning the University's formal attitude on the position to be adopted by course organisers towards students whose course work was affected adversely by their being in paid employment. The UCTL had agreed that the University should have a general policy statement on this issue and had asked that a proposed form of words be submitted to the next meeting for consideration, before being referred to the Senate.
- 169.2 The Committee noted that other universities had policy statements in which they stipulated the maximum hours per week during term-time which students were permitted to undertake employment (e.g. Liverpool: 15 hours; Aston: 15 hours; Brighton: 12 hours).
- 169.3 The Committee also noted that current Home Office regulations in regard to an application for an overseas student's work permit stipulated that an

overseas student may work up to a maximum of 20 hours per week during term-time (and full-time during vacation time).

- 169.4 The Committee agreed to recommend the following proposed policy statement to the Senate (document UCTL/050299/143 refers):-

The University is sympathetic to the financial burdens placed upon students and recognises that many full-time students undertake part-time paid employment to provide financial support for their studies. The University's general guideline is that full-time students should spend no more than 15 hours per week undertaking employment during term-time. Notwithstanding this guideline, it remains the students' responsibility to ensure that their employment commitments do not conflict with the academic requirements of their studies. Where a potential conflict is expected to arise in regard to fulfilling the attendance and/or performance requirements of a particular course, students are strongly recommended to seek advice from the relevant Course Organiser or Head of Department, as appropriate, before undertaking their employment duties.

CLASSIFICATION OF HONOURS DEGREES IN CHEMISTRY AND ENGINEERING

(Minute 141.3 refers)

- 170.1 The Committee considered papers from the Heads of the Departments of Chemistry and Engineering, which included comparative data on degree classification in their disciplines determined by using the *Grade Spectrum* and by the Department's current procedures. Both Heads of Department had requested that they be permitted to continue to use their current procedures for determining degree classification.

(copies filed as UCTL/050299/144-145)

- 170.2 The Committee considered it highly desirable that the University should aim for a uniform method of determining degree classification across the University: this would not only ensure the maintenance and comparability of standards within an individual discipline year-on-year but would also give greater consistency in the comparability of standards of the University's awards across all disciplines. The Committee considered that many of the issues raised by the two Departments as to why they did not wish to use the *Grade Spectrum* had been considered when the University implemented the *Grade Spectrum* for all degree programmes. It was not logical to assume that degree classifications determined by the *Grade Spectrum* were inappropriate if they deviated from a Department's historical methods.

- 170.3 The Committee acknowledged the concerns expressed by the two Departments and agreed that these would be considered by the Committee as part of its on-going review of the *Grade Spectrum*, a report on which would be considered by the Committee in October 1999 following analysis of the June 1999 results.

- 170.4 After discussion, the Committee agreed that both Departments be permitted to continue to use their current procedures for the current session but that they be asked to adopt the *Grade Spectrum* system for determining degree classification for students entering honours programmes in September 2000 at the latest; and that, in regard to the Committee's review of the *Grade Spectrum*, the two Departments be asked to suggest possible refinements to the *Grade Spectrum* which would address their concerns.

Action: Clerk

THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN THE SUPERVISION OF EXAMINATIONS

- 171.1 The Committee received a request that the University consider appointing temporary invigilators to assist with examinations rather than academic staff.
(copy filed as UCTL/050299/146)

- 171.2 The Committee noted that seven other Scottish universities, including all the other ancient universities, required academic staff to supervise and invigilate examinations at the main diets. After discussion, the Committee agreed that it was the responsibility of academic staff to supervise and invigilate examinations in their subjects, to ensure that any academic queries or problems in regard to an examination could be addressed without delay. The Committee considered that the number of hours per year which a member of academic staff would be required to devote to these examination responsibilities was relatively very small. The Committee therefore agreed unanimously that the University's current practice that academic staff be required to supervise and invigilate examinations should continue.

Action: Clerk

INITIATING A DEBATE ON EXPLICIT STANDARDS

(Minute 159.4 refers)

- 172.1 In response to the suggestion in the University's Quality Audit Report that the UCTL consider initiating a debate on explicit standards, the Committee, at its meeting on 11 December 1998, had asked that details of the progress, to date, of the subject benchmark groups and of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) current proposals in regard to reporting and making judgements about academic standards be obtained.

- 172.2 The Committee received an overview of the current position in regard to standards and benchmarking (UCTL/050299/147 refers) and copies of the following documents, which were Appendices to document 147:-

Appendix 1 : QAA Institutional Briefing Paper : Programme Specifications
(24 September 1998)

Appendix 2 : QAA Institutional Briefing Paper : Subject Benchmarking (24
September 1998)

- Appendix 3 : Consultation Document - General Guidelines for the Academic Review of Bachelors Honours Degree Programmes in Chemistry
- Appendix 4 : Consultation Document - History Subject Benchmarking Group Draft Statement
- Appendix 5 : Benchmark Standards for Law (Second Draft Following Meeting on 4 November 1998)
- Appendix 6 : The Role, Functions and Performance Criteria of Academic Reviewers (revised December 1998)
- Appendix 7 : The Definition, Verification and Maintenance of Academic Standards - A Discussion Document

- 172.3 The Committee discussed the elements that contributed to the definition, verification and maintenance of academic standards (Appendix 7 to document 147 and Section 3 of the Academic Quality Handbook refer). These included, *inter alia*, the following: the criteria for admissions to honours; the regulatory framework; course and programme design, validation and review; assessment practices, including the crucial role of External Examiners in verifying and monitoring academic standards.
- 172.4 The Committee agreed that these elements were still appropriate and considered that they were likely to contribute to academic standards becoming more explicit as the QAA developed proposals for a quality assurance framework. These would centre around the specification of learning outcomes to indicate how and where subject benchmark standards were located within programmes, the assessment of which would be monitored by a more robust External Examiner system. The QAA also had proposed that external subject experts (Academic Reviewers) would be appointed to make judgements and report on academic standards achieved at the subject and programme level.
- 172.5 In regard to the criteria for admission to honours, the Committee considered that, in principle, students judged to be capable of achieving an honours degree normally should not be prevented from entering honours due to resource limitations. However, it accepted that numbers may be capped and, hence, admission to honours be more competitive in some cases e.g. particularly popular subjects or those which required expensive laboratory equipment or materials. While accepting that students were predominantly admitted to the University with the expectation of completing an honours degree, the Committee considered that academic standards were further safeguarded by the requirement to satisfy Departmental criteria for admission to honours which were in addition to the regulatory requirement of achieving a particular number and range of credits in the pre-honours programme.
- 172.6 Concerning learning outcomes, the Committee welcomed an offer from the Director of the Careers & Appointments Service to compile a list of transferable skills which the major employers of graduates wished to see

inculcated and developed during degree programmes. This would be submitted to the next meeting.

Action: JLM

- 172.7 The Committee considered that analysis of data should be a key component of course and programme review and, hence, should lead to verification, maintenance and enhancement of the standards of the University's awards. It therefore reiterated its view that Departments be provided routinely with data from the student record system on a consistent and user-friendly basis, and with advice on the analysis of relevant performance indicators (entry qualifications/cohort analysis; progression rates; course and programme assessment outcomes; first-destination statistics).

Action: Clerk

- 172.8 The Committee noted that the Audit Team which had visited the University in May 1998 had observed, in its discussions with staff, "some uncertainty as to where responsibilities lay for initiating debate on these [aims and objectives/learning outcomes] in the University. It was suggested to the Team, for example, that University guidelines in the area of learning outcomes would be helpful in supporting discussion at Departmental level". The Committee therefore agreed that the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD) should co-ordinate a University-wide debate on aims and objectives/learning outcomes by arranging a series of staff development events. The debate would focus on the CLPD's existing guidelines on writing aims and objectives (which had been available on the University's web site since the summer of 1998), but should include discussion of the outcomes, to date, of the Subject Benchmark Groups (Minute 172.2 refers). To this end, the Heads of the Departments of Chemistry, History and Law would be invited to ask staff within their Department who had been involved in the benchmarking trials to participate with the CLPD in taking forward this debate. The primary aim of the debate would be to develop a framework for defining explicit outcomes at the subject level and their role in making academic standards explicit, for wide dissemination within the University. This would be achieved by (a) differentiating between aims and objectives at the course, programme and departmental level, (b) focusing on the identification of clear statements of the intended outcomes of a programme in terms of the following generic categories: student knowledge and understanding; key skills; cognitive skills; subject-specific skills, (c) discussing methods of assessing key (transferable) skills. Members of the Academic Standards Committees would be invited to participate in the debate in view of their key role in the University's course and programme validation process. The Clerk also would ascertain the timescale for the QAA to make available the outcomes of the subject benchmarking groups to institutions for formal consideration, and whether there was any objection to the current documents (Minute 172.2 refers) being circulated widely within the University.

Action: JAF/TW

- 172.9 Furthermore, the Committee agreed that, since it was proposed that judgements and reports on standards by Academic Reviewers would be

based on the relationship between learning outcomes, programme specifications and subject benchmarking information, Departments should take forward the outcome of the debate in paragraph 172.8 above by considering whether their course and programme aims and objectives required revision, in anticipation of the requirement to prepare programme specifications in due course based on the four generic headings identified in paragraph 172.8.

Action: Clerk

- 172.10 Also, the Committee agreed that the Academic Standards Committees should monitor the impact of the above debate during the planning cycle validation process via the scrutiny of course and programme proposal forms.

Action: ASC Clerks

REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON UNDERGRADUATE MODULARISATION

- 173.1 The Committee received the Report of the Working Party on Undergraduate Modularisation.

(copy filed as UCTL/050299/148)

- 173.2 The Committee agreed that the Report be amended in light of discussion and submitted to the Deans and the UPC Conveners, who were asked to undertake consultations as they deemed appropriate with a view to providing constructive feedback on the Report's recommendations. This feedback, and any individual comments from members on the Report, should be submitted to the Clerk by 15 March 1999. A revised draft of the Report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for final approval before submission to the Senate.

Action: Clerk

GUIDELINES ON OBSERVING TEACHING

- 174.1 The Committee approved Guidelines on Observing Teaching, which had been prepared by the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD) in response to a request from the Committee to provide assistance to individuals and Departments who were already implementing, or contemplating establishing, a process whereby staff teaching might be observed by peers or by others. The guidelines also would be helpful as background to the introduction of the practice elements of the programme being developed by the University for accreditation by the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

- 174.2 The Committee asked that the guidelines be circulated to Heads of Department and that complementary staff development events be arranged in due course.

(copy filed as UCTL/050299/149)

Action: JAF

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- 175.1 The Committee approved in principle proposals from the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD) in regard to the development of a quality assured programme for all categories of teaching staff for the development of higher education teaching skills which would seek to embed the principle that all University teachers must be reflective practitioners, developing and enhancing their teaching skills to help their careers. The programme was being developed in direct response to the creation of the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) and the University's decision to propose a programme for ILTHE accreditation in 1999. The CLPD would be responsible for developing and managing the programme.
- 175.2 The Committee asked that the proposals be promulgated widely within the University in due course.

(copy filed as UCTL/050299/150)

Action: JAF

GUIDANCE NOTE ON ACADEMIC APPEALS - MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

- 176.1 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity and Law) had expressed concern that the wording of the Guidance Note on Academic Appeals did not make it sufficiently clear that self-certification was not permitted in support of an appeal where students believed that illness might have affected their performance in an element of prescribed degree assessment.
- 176.2 The Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate the proposed addition to paragraph 3 of the Guidance Note on Academic Appeals as highlighted in ***bold italics*** below:-

3. Notwithstanding the above time limit, details of illness (***which must be certified by a medical practitioner***) and/or other personal circumstances which students believe may have affected their performance in an element of prescribed degree assessment will be accepted as grounds for appeal only if the Head of the relevant Department has received written notification of them no later than one week after the date on which a student submitted or appeared for the assessment concerned. Where good reasons have prevented a student from notifying the Head of the Department within this period, the student should write to the Head of the Department as soon as is practicable and give details both of the illness (***which must be certified by a medical practitioner***) and/or other personal circumstances and of the events which prevented him or her from notifying the Head of the Department within the prescribed period. Details reported after notification of a result will be accepted as grounds of appeal only in exceptional circumstances.

Action: Clerk

RELEASE OF CAS MARKS FOR ASSESSMENTS WHICH ARE NOT PART OF AN INDIVIDUAL COURSE

- 177.1 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine) had discussed the question of releasing CAS marks to students which contributed to degree classification but which were not components of an individual course e.g. general, summative written examinations. Although Honours Handbooks should indicate the percentage contribution of these elements of assessment in determining a student's overall degree classification, there was currently no mechanism for officially informing students of their performance in these summative assessments: consequently, students undertaking programmes which contained these elements would be unable to predict the classification which would normally be expected by applying their course CAS marks to the *Grade Spectrum* (or alternative Departmental procedures for determining degree classification, where these had been approved).
- 177.2 The Committee noted that the Student Record system was capable of allocating a code to summative assessments. This would allow class/examination lists to be run by Departments, which could then formally submit individual CAS marks and results for these assessments, duly signed by the External Examiner. The results could be recorded on a student's computerised record and could appear on results letters and transcripts. However, when the Senate agreed that CAS marks be released to students it did so on the basis that these would be only for courses.
- 177.3 The Committee agreed to recommend to the Senate that CAS marks for prescribed degree assessments which were not a component of the assessment for an individual course be released formally to candidates and that the procedures outlined in paragraph 177.2 above be implemented.

PROMOTING INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROGRAMME

- 178.1 The Committee noted that the University's commitment to supporting more independent forms of learning, as highlighted in the Strategic Plan, was being taken forward by the Centre for Learning and Professional Development, in partnership with the Learning Technology Unit (Minute 179 refers) and with the Faculties, via the Promoting Independent Learning Programme.
- (copy filed as UCTL/050299/151)*
- 178.2 The programme also would serve as the vehicle by which the University would respond to the comments made in the Quality Audit Report in regard to the extension of resource-based learning and the review of our approach to the provision of study skills [see Appendix 1 to UCTL minutes of 11.12.98 - paragraphs 87(iii) and 88(iii)].

Action: JAF

LEARNING TECHNOLOGY UNIT

- 179.1 The Committee noted that a Learning Technology Unit (LTU) had been established to stimulate, promote and support the deployment of learning technologies within the Faculties of Arts & Divinity, Social Sciences & Law and Science & Engineering (support for the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences was provided by the Medi-CAL Unit, based at the Medical School). The LTU was line-managed from within the Directorate of Information Systems & Services but its activities were directed by a Steering Group whose members represented the interests of the teaching and learning community.
- 179.2 The Committee received a report which included, *inter alia*, the aims and objectives of the Unit and details of seven projects which were currently being supported.

(copy filed as UCTL/050299/152)

PROPOSED DEGREE OF MEng WITH DIPLOMA IN MANAGEMENT

- 180.1 The Committee considered a paper from the Head of the Department of Engineering in which it was proposed that well-qualified engineering applicants be permitted to enrol for a joint programme of study which would lead to two qualifications i.e. the degree of MEng and a Diploma in Management.
- 180.2 Although the proposal had been noted by the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Engineering), the latter had referred it to the UCTL to discuss the principle of students obtaining two qualifications from a single period of study.
- 180.3 Professor Rodger gave an oral report of the reasoning behind the proposal and explained why permission was being sought for this proposal outwith the normal planning cycle timetable. He explained that students would complete 24 credits of Management courses during the programme, 12 of which would be in addition to completing the MEng programme, but within the normal timescale for the MEng (i.e. five years). Although these courses would be selected from a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate level courses, permission was being sought for an undergraduate Diploma in Management.
- 180.4 After discussion, the Committee agreed that the proposal be approved in principle and that formal approval be sought from the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Engineering) and the three Academic Standards Committees, each of which would have an interest in the proposal. The Committee further agreed that the proposal should be discussed with the University Postgraduate Officer in Engineering who was a member of the ASC(PG) prior to formal consideration by that Committee; and that any

publicity regarding the programme should indicate clearly that it was subject to validation.

Action: Clerk

**INSTITUTE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER
EDUCATION (ILTHE)**

181. The Committee noted that the first briefing paper from the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education had been circulated recently to all members and to all Departments, for information.
(copy filed as UCTL/050299/154)

NEXT MEETING

182. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Friday 26 March 1999 in Committee Room 2.

TW/LG
22.2.99

UCTLMeet4/minjan99