

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 28 May 1999**

*Present:* Professor IR Macdonald (Convener), Dr JH Farrington, Professor DF Houlihan, Dr WF Long, Dr NLM Milne, Mr C O'Sullivan, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr JG Roberts, Professor AA Rodger, Dr IR Torrance, Professor DW Urwin and Mr D Welsh with Mr JA Forster, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr JLA Madden, Dr PJ Murray, Mrs MI Park, Mr G Pryor and Dr T Webb (Clerk).

*Apologies:* Professor PR Duff, Professor SD Logan, Professor PA Racey, Dr JG Simpson and Mr F Lovie

**MINUTES**

194. The Committee approved the Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 March 1999.  
(copy filed as UCTL/280599/165)

**REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR STRUCTURE**

- 195.1 The Committee noted that the Senate had discussed the *Review of the Undergraduate Modular Structure* on 5 May 1999. It received a summary of the Senate's discussion in regard to each of the UCTL's recommendations and of general issues arising from the discussion, including, where appropriate, suggested action in taking forward the various recommendations.  
(copy filed as UCTL/280599/166)

- 195.2 The Committee agreed that the summary document should be revised in light of discussion at the meeting and action taken, as indicated in Appendix I. This document would be distributed electronically to Departments for the attention of all Senators and academic staff.

(Appendix I)  
**Action: Clerk**

**THE ASSURANCE OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

- 196.1 The Committee received a paper summarising the current position in regard to the development, by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), of an integrated quality assurance framework. It included a position paper on *Defining Explicit Standards and Preparing for Subject Review*, which included the following three Appendices:-

Appendix 1: The Assurance of Quality and Standards at the University of Aberdeen  
Appendix 2: Subject Benchmark Statements and Internal Teaching Reviews  
Appendix 3: Timetable for Establishing Subject Benchmarks and for the Review of Subjects using the New Methodology

(copy filed as UCTL/280599/167)

196.2 The Committee approved the draft position paper and agreed that a Working Party be established with the following remit and composition:-

Remit

- (a) to explore the relationship between standards, programme specifications, aims and objectives (learning outcomes), national subject benchmarks, and assessment processes, and to submit proposals to the UCTL as soon as possible concerning the initiation of a University-wide debate on these issues;
- (b) to advise the UCTL as to how the Internal Teaching Review procedures should be revised (having regard to the QAA's procedures for subject review, details of which hopefully would be published in early 2000), to allow the University to demonstrate that the quality of educational provision and the standards of the University's awards were being maintained, and enhanced where appropriate. This would include recommendations, after consultation with the relevant Deans, in regard to the review of the three national subject groups (i.e. biosciences; agriculture, forestry, agricultural and food sciences; languages and related studies) which covered programmes offered by more than one university department (Appendix 3 to document 167 above refers);
- (c) to draft responses to future QAA consultation documents concerning the new procedures for subject review.

Composition

- Dr JG Roberts (Convener);
- up to three representatives nominated by each Dean, to include the Heads of the Departments of Chemistry, History, Law, Engineering, Geography and Management Studies (or their nominees where these have been (or will be) involved in the benchmarking process);
- the President of the SRC (or his nominee);
- staff from the Centre for Learning & Professional Development;
- staff from the Directorate of Information Systems & Services;
- the Director of the Careers & Appointments Service;
- Deputy Academic Registrar (Clerk).

196.3 The Committee agreed that, pending the publication of details of the new UK quality assurance framework and a report from the Working Party, the second round of Internal Teaching Reviews for 1999/2000 should:-

- (a) continue to be based on the University's current procedures and framework;
- (b) include an external member on each Review Panel;
- (c) be scheduled for the following Departments:-

Celtic; French; Agriculture; Forestry; Plant & Soil Science; Zoology.

*Action: Clerk*

- 197.1 The Committee noted that, in response to the Quality Audit Report, which indicated that the University may consider it desirable to “review its approach to the provision of study skills”, it had been agreed that the Centre for Learning & Professional Development (CLPD) should undertake, through the Promoting Independent Learning programme, an evaluation of the course *Academic Skills: Getting Started* for all first-year MA, BLE, BD and BTh students.
- 197.2 The Committee received an evaluation prepared by Moira Fraser of the CLPD and a report on the 1998 course prepared by the Course Co-ordinator, Dr Debbie Simonton.  
(copies filed as UCTL/280599/168)
- 197.3 The two reports had been considered by a Joint Meeting of the Teaching and Learning Committees of the Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law on 10 May 1999. The Joint Meeting had agreed that the course should remain unchanged for 1999 and that issues relating to accreditation, compulsory status and exemptions should be considered further at a future date. The Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity and Law) also had considered the two reports, on 12 May 1999, and had noted the decisions of the above Joint Meeting. The ASC had endorsed the points made in Section 7 of Dr Simonton’s report and had considered that the perennial issues needed to be properly addressed, especially as to whether or not the course should be compulsory.
- 197.4 A detailed discussion ensued which related, *inter alia*, to the following:-
- (i) the requirements of different subjects in regard to academic skills being addressed within a subject context and the merits of front-loading a course for some students while others would benefit from the embedding of skills within the subject context;
  - (ii) the awareness that *Tools for Science* would be available to Science students in 1999/2000 for the first time and that an evaluation of this course would be important in considering future skills provision;
  - (iii) the differences between *Academic Skills: Getting Started* and *Tools for Science* concerning their delivery pattern and style, whether they were compulsory for some students, and credit-rating;
  - (iv) the potential impact of more structured training within schools emanating from *Higher Still*, and the continuity and progression of any induction training which the University might provide when compared with core skills developed within schools;
  - (v) whether the University would wish to implement a programme of communication and information technology training which all undergraduates were required to complete as a condition of graduation, with a range of levels to accommodate “beginners”, those who were “computer literate”, and those who were “experts”, and how the progressive development of academic skills might be embedded within courses, both horizontally (i.e. within a particular Level) and vertically (i.e. between Levels), to cater for students entering with different abilities;
  - (vi) the possible impact of the national subject benchmarks, which were being devised by the academic communities, in regard to the relationship between skills, programme specifications and academic standards.

- 197.5 The Committee agreed the following:-
- (a) that Mr Pryor and Mr Forster be asked to undertake consultation as deemed appropriate and to prepare a paper for the next meeting, to recommend a Computing and

Information Technology (C&IT) strategy for the provision of academic skills for students, which should take cognisance of the above broader issues;

**Action: GP/JAF**

- (b) that the course *Academic Skills: Getting Started* should continue in its present form for 1999, as agreed above, but that the provision for 2000/2001 should be reviewed in light of the C&IT strategy proposals and an evaluation of the 1999 course and the course *Tools for Science*;
- (c) that the Committee's appreciation be recorded to Miss Fraser and Dr Simonton for their most helpful and informative reports.

**Action: Clerk**

### **SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (SCQF)**

- 198.1 The Committee noted that the University had been asked to comment on the overall shape, purpose and features of a proposed Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), which had been developed jointly by officers of COSHEP, QAA and SQA in response to Recommendation 1 of the "Garrick" Report: this urged the higher education institutions, QAA, SQA and the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access to work together in adopting an integrated framework based on SCOTCAT. The Framework embraced all Scottish qualifications from Standard Grade to Doctorate, and included academic, professional and vocational qualifications. The development of the details of the higher education part of the Framework would be consistent with the overall SCQF but would be undertaken separately by QAA, which would consult the HE sector towards the Autumn of 1999.
- 198.2 The Framework was intended to widen access to, and increase participation in, lifelong learning, and to improve the skills of the Scottish workforce. It would achieve this by helping all learners, employers and providers and users of qualifications to understand the Scottish qualifications system, including how different qualifications related to each other. It would also assist with the transfer of relevant credits from one qualification to another. It was intended that the SCQF would be implemented from 2000 onwards. Current developments in higher education and in Higher National Certificates and Diplomas would be planned to link directly with the SCQF. A further paper on the SCQF would be published later in 1999 and would take account of the responses to the current consultation and any developments that had taken place within the various qualifications streams.
- 198.3 The Committee received a copy of the consultation document *Adding Value to Learning: The Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework* and a draft response to the consultation document, which had been approved by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee on 21 May 1999.  
(copy filed as UCTL/280599/169)
- 198.4 The Committee approved the draft response, subject to minor modification in light of discussion at the meeting, and agreed that it be forwarded to the Scottish Qualifications Authority.  
(copy filed as UCTL/280599/169a)

### **THE DEARING REPORT, QAA AND CAREERS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

- 199.1 The Committee received a paper from the Director of the Careers & Appointments Service concerning the development of career management skills in students. It was noted that, in response

to the Dearing Report, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was drafting a Code of Practice on Career Progression in Higher Education which would be one of several Codes being developed as part of an integrated Code of Practice on Assuring Quality and Standards.

*(copy filed as UCTL/280599/170)*

199.2 While the paper suggested a way forward by a combination of embedding career management skills within curricula and the provision of careers support outwith the curriculum, the Committee noted that no clear guidance was yet available in regard to the precepts which would form the basis of the QAA's Code of Practice.

199.3 The Committee therefore agreed that a Working Party be established to consider Mr Madden's paper and the draft QAA Code (which would be circulated to HEIs for comment in due course), and to make firm recommendations in regard to career progression, the development of employable skills and the role of academic departments and of the Careers & Appointments Service in managing careers development. The membership of the Working Party would be:-

- Dr JH Farrington (Convener)
- two members of academic staff from each Faculty, to be nominated by Deans
- the SRC President (or his nominee)
- the Director of the Careers & Appointments Service
- staff from the Centre for Learning & Professional Development
- the Academic Registrar

*Action: Clerk*

### **MEDICAL CERTIFICATES**

200.1 The Committee noted that the University had received a letter from a general practitioner in Stonehaven pointing out that he had been asked on two occasions recently to provide certificates for students who had been off sick. In each case they had been off the week before the consultation, had not consulted with a doctor at the time of their illness but had been asked by academic staff to provide a backdated certificate.

200.2 The doctor had pointed out that for him to have issued such a certificate would have been unethical and in any case of no use, given that he would not have been able to confirm the illness.

200.3 The Committee agreed that it was inappropriate for students to request backdated medical certificates where it was impossible for a doctor to verify the illness. It agreed that guidance should be provided, in consultation with Professor Ritchie, to indicate to staff the advice which they should give to students concerning the provision of medical certificates.

*Action: Clerk*

### **DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICE IN TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

201.1 The Committee noted that the *Quality Audit Report* had suggested that the University might consider it desirable to "promote a more proactive approach to the dissemination of good practice in teaching and assessment". The Committee approved proposals in this regard which had been prepared by the Director of the Centre for Learning and Professional Development.

### **EXAMINERS' MEETINGS HELD BY VIDEO-CONFERENCING**

- 202.1 The Committee noted that last session, exceptionally, a Department had been given permission to hold an Examiners' Meeting by video-conferencing in regard to a postgraduate taught programme as the External Examiner was unable to attend the University. The Department had indicated at the time that it would be a one-off request. However, since all involved had agreed that it had worked well, the Department had requested that it continue to be permitted to hold final Examiners' Meetings (for postgraduate taught programmes) by video-conferencing, if agreed with the External Examiner.
- 202.2 The Committee agreed that Heads of Department be informed that video-conferencing should be used to hold final Examiners' Meetings for taught programmes only if an External Examiner, exceptionally, was unable to travel to Aberdeen and provided (a) that there was no requirement for the External Examiner to conduct oral examinations, (b) that arrangements were made for the External Examiner to receive copies of candidates' prescribed degree assessments upon request, and (c) that the Department was responsible for making all arrangements for conducting the meeting and for all costs associated with use of this medium above £250.

**Action: Clerk**

### **QUALITY AUDIT REPORT**

- 203.1 The Committee noted the progress to date in responding to the QAA Audit Team's points for further consideration.

(copy filed as UCTL/280599/172a)

### **STUDENTS' WORK AFFECTED BY THEIR UNDERTAKING PAID EMPLOYMENT (Minute 185.2 refers)**

- 204.1 The Committee noted that the Senate (5 May 1999) had agreed its proposed Policy Statement concerning students' work affected by their undertaking paid employment.

### **PARTICIPATION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS IN ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

- 205.1 The Committee noted that the Clerk had met with representatives of the two Departments which had expressed concerns at the increase in workload for the January 1999 examinations that had resulted from using the revised assessment procedures (Minute 143 of 23 October 1998 refers). The Departments had agreed that the submission by students of two copies of an in-course assessment (one to be retained by the Department and made available to the External Examiner on request, and one to be returned to the student after marking), when coupled with the reduction in time spent on photocopying as a consequence of the UCTL confirming that it was acceptable to send the originals of written examination scripts to External Examiners by registered post, should greatly reduce the additional workload which the Departments had experienced in January.

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- 205.2 Since the revised procedures had not been referred to the Senate, the Departments had requested clarification as to whether they were guidelines or policy. The Departments had been informed that the Convener of the UCTL had confirmed that they represented policy.

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS (Minute 175.1 refers)**

- 206.1 The UCTL noted that an ILT Programme Planning Committee had been established to design one or more development programmes that would meet the needs of University staff engaged in teaching activities and which would if possible be suitable for accreditation by the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT). A report on the work of the Committee to date was received and noted.

*(copy filed as UCTL/280599/173)*

### **FIRST DESTINATION STATISTICS**

**(Minute 190.4 refers)**

- 207.1 The Committee noted that the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) had confirmed that the software which had been specified locally to extract relevant First Destination Statistics (FDS) from the computerised student record system conformed accurately, in terms of coverage, to HESA's requirements. A paper from the Deputy Clerk to the Senate was attached for information and included a revised FDS return for 1999 and suggested proposals for improving future returns which the Academic Section and the Careers & Appointments Service would consider.

*(copy filed as UCTL/280599/174)*

**Action:DMJ/JLM**

### **GUIDELINES ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING**

- 208.1 The Committee received a copy of the above Guidelines, published recently by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and noted that copies had been sent to all members of the Academic Standards Committees and Undergraduate Programme Committees. Departments would be informed that copies could be obtained from the Senate Office and that the Guidelines could be accessed at the QAA's web-site: **<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public.htm>**

*(copy filed as UCTL/280599/175)*

### **LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY UNIT**

- 209.1 The Committee received and noted a report on recent activities of the Learning and Technology Unit.

*(copy filed as UCTL/280599/176)*

**RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

210.1 The Committee noted that the following publications were available from the Senate Office (ext. 2039) for consultation:-

- (a) *SHEFC Quality Assessment Annual Report 1997-1998*
- (b) *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Six-Monthly Progress Report covering the period from September 1998-February 1999*  
[Appendix C to this document was circulated to members (*copy filed as UCTL/280599/177*), which gave details of forthcoming consultations and key dates in the process of piloting and trialing of the QAA's new methodology].
- (c) *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Annual Report and Financial Summary 1997-1998*
- (d) *Subject Benchmark Statements*  
The draft statements produced by the benchmarking groups for Chemistry, History and Law had been published recently to "encourage further discussion on and understanding about subject benchmarking" and could be accessed at:- **<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public.htm>**

**DATES OF MEETINGS IN 1999/2000**

211.1 The Committee noted that meetings would be held at 2.00 p.m. on the following Fridays:-

22 October 1999; 10 December 1999; 4 February 2000; 24 March 2000; 26 May 2000

TW/LG  
22.6.99

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## REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR STRUCTURE

The recommendations arising from the review of the undergraduate modular structure are listed below. They are followed by the Senate's response (5 May 1999) in **bold** and by the action agreed by the UCTL (28 May 1999) in order to take forward each recommendation.

General issues arising from the Senate discussion are listed at the end of the recommendations and are followed by a commentary and, where appropriate, further action agreed by the UCTL (28 May 1999).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That specialised honours programmes be designed on the principle of developing a student's knowledge and understanding of a subject in a progressive manner through a tight discipline of specific pre- (and co-) requisites, but that honours programmes based on courses which did not require specific pre-requisites should be permitted, subject to justification by the parent Department(s) to the satisfaction of the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committee and Academic Standards Committee.

**Approved.** Action: *Heads of Department to note. UPCs and ASCs to monitor.*

2. That the University should retain its existing range of designated and undesignated non-honours degrees but await clarification of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework before re-defining the requirements for these degrees; meanwhile, Departments should be encouraged to propose designated programmes to complement any proposals for new honours programmes.

**Approved.** Action: *Heads of Department to note. UPCs and ASCs to action as appropriate.*

3. That the University review its portfolio of courses and degrees which could be studied on a part-time basis if the survey of part-time provision being undertaken by the Centre for Continuing Education identifies a sufficient demand to justify the additional costs of preparing and delivering suitable courses and programmes.

**Approved.** Action: *Clerk to liaise with the Director of the Centre for Continuing Education.*

4. That Departments be permitted in principle to offer 24-week courses as part of the final year of honours programmes, subject to (a) justification being provided on academic grounds to the satisfaction of the validating committees, (b) the identification of a means of assessing students at the end of the first half-session for those who wished to exit a 24-week course at that point, and (c) it being demonstrated that 24-week courses would not inhibit student choice with regard to their final year honours programme. [In considering such proposals, it is envisaged that the ASCs will take into account the percentage contribution of a 24-week course, in credit terms, to the overall annual credit load (and the academic case where this is 100% - see Senate response below); the number of elements of assessment which a 24-week course may contribute to a student's degree classification in regard to the total credits to be assigned to such a course; and the range of other courses available in the final year honours programme for students who wish to take a 24-week course, particularly for joint degree students. Also, an ASC might stipulate that formal teaching on 24-week courses during the first half-session revision and assessment period should not be permitted, as this could affect adversely students' performance in their first half-session examinations (an exception to this could be 24-week courses of 24 credits in value)].

**Approved, on the understanding that Departments could make an academic case for the final honours year comprising a single 24-credit course. It would be for the relevant Academic Standards Committee (ASC) to determine whether or not to approve requests for 24-week courses [and, for 24-credit courses, whether (b) above should apply].**

Action: *Heads of Department to note. ASCs to action as appropriate.*

5. That, in the first instance, the Deans of the Faculties of Science & Engineering and Medicine & Medical Sciences should establish a joint Working Group to form a plan for the design of biological

science programmes based on academic considerations. This should identify preferred patterns of delivery and indicate the implications for the timetabling of teaching accommodation. [The plan should highlight the implications of its proposals on the development of joint programmes both within these Faculties and elsewhere across the University, and the impact for the timetabling of courses across the University. To this end, the Working Group should seek the advice of the Assistant Secretary (Examinations & Timetabling) in regard to the practicalities and implications of its proposals for timetabling].

**Approved.** *Action: Heads of Department to note. Professor Houlihan and Professor Logan to take forward initially with Mrs Park, and subsequently with Dr Roberts and Professor Sloane (see Recommendation 6 below).*

6. That the Deans of the Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law be invited to comment on the implications of the above plan in regard to the delivery and timetabling of courses within their Faculties and for the development of inter-disciplinary programmes across the University. [A report from the four Deans will then be considered by the Working Party on Undergraduate Modularisation with a view to proposals being submitted to the UCTL at a future date].

**Approved.** *Action: Heads of Department to note. Dr Roberts and Professor Sloane to take forward in due course after consultation with Professor Houlihan and Professor Logan (see Recommendation 5).*

7. That the current anomaly whereby Level 1 and (to a lesser extent) Level 2 courses were linked strictly to contact hours should be abandoned and the credit-rating of all courses should relate to notional student effort, with one credit being equivalent to approximately 36-40 hours of notional student effort excluding revision and assessment periods (i.e. 3 hours per week over 12 weeks: 6 hours over 6 weeks etc.). [This would be compatible with the SCOTCAT guidelines on which the proposed Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework was based. It is expected that the ASCs will continue to query course proposals where the formal contact component is considered to be either excessive or insufficient].

**Approved.** *Action: Heads of Department and ASCs to note and action.*

8. That the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) recommends strongly that the University should move to a 24-credit first year structure for science and engineering students based on six 4-credit courses as the norm, and that years 2 and above should be based on a 24-credit load throughout the University; and that the Deans of the Faculties of Science & Engineering and of Medicine & Medical Sciences be invited to discuss this recommendation within their Faculties and to report to the UCTL in due course. [Thus, the normal annual load would be 24 credits in each year for all students. This would require a change in the Regulations, both in regard to progress requirements and degree requirements. It should lead to a more effective use of staff resources, a reduction in the teaching and assessment load on staff, and the creation of a common structure across the University. This would be advantageous to those students who wished to study both "Arts" and "Science" courses at Levels 1 and 2, and should facilitate the development of cross-Faculty programmes and the internal "transfer" of students from "MA" to "Science" degrees. It is emphasised that the proposed reduced credit load for BSc students from 32 to 24 credits at Level 1 does not represent a reduction in overall student effort; and that even at Level 1 the different nature of Arts and Science subjects may mean that the latter justifiably might require more contact hours per credit. It was also considered that a re-packaging of courses for professionally-accredited programmes should be achievable to comply with a University-wide system for credit-rating based on notional student effort while satisfying professional accreditation requirements in regard to the breadth of subjects studied at each level].

**Following much discussion at the Senate, it was agreed that the Deans of the four Faculties should discuss the above Recommendation, together with Recommendations 9, 11 and 12 below, and report to the UCTL in due course. A request was also made at the Senate that discussion of these Recommendations within the Faculties should involve as wide a range of staff as possible. Action: Deans to take forward.**

9. That, in view of the above, the relevant Faculties should initiate a debate on the nature of the education which should be provided for science students in year 1. [It was considered that, with Advanced Highers, if more students entered into year 2, year 1 may need to become a more general (possibly skills-based) curriculum within a science context].

10. That since a change of the Science and Engineering structure as proposed might only be acceptable if Departmental funding arrangements were revised, all Deans should initiate a debate on resource allocation. [While the proposed reduction in the number of Level 1 courses to be taken by BSc students, from eight to six, would lead to a reduction in the number of students in the average Department, the total resource available to teach would remain the same. Faculty funding arrangements should therefore be reviewed to compensate for any changes in the distribution of students across Faculties].
11. That, normally, all new courses be based on a standard course size of 4 credits at Level 1 (requiring 144 - 160 hours of notional student effort) and 3 or 6 credits as the standard size at all other Levels (requiring 108 - 120 and 216 - 240 hours of notional student effort, respectively) with courses of other values being permitted, subject to Departments justifying variation from the standard structure to the satisfaction of the validation committees.
12. That Departments be asked to consider whether existing courses at Level 2 which do not comply with the requirements in recommendations 7 and 11 could be amended to comply with the proposed structure.

**After a long and detailed debate of Recommendations 8, 9, 11 and 12, it was agreed that Deans should initiate discussions in all Faculties with regard to this group of Recommendations, to also include Recommendation 10, and to report to the UCTL in due course. It was also agreed that consultations should be as wide and open as possible. Action: Deans to take forward and note Senators' concerns that reducing the standard number of courses taken by Level 1 students in Science could result in a range of the following outcomes: subsidiary subjects could be omitted from core curricula; course flexibility could be reduced; competitive advantage in student recruitment vis-à-vis the other ancient Scottish universities could be lost. Indeed, the suggestion was made in this context that consideration should be given by the humanities faculties to increasing the standard load of courses from 3 to 4 per half-session. The UCTL would re-consider Recommendations 8, 9, 11 and 12 in light of the forthcoming report from Deans.**

13. That the practice of aggregating credits for the degrees of BSc and BSc Agr into "units of study" be abandoned and the Regulations for those degrees be revised accordingly.

**Approved.** Action: Senate Office.

14. That the Conveners of the three Academic Standards Committees should consider the implications of credit-rating vacation courses (e.g. field courses or work experience) which were a compulsory component of a programme on the same basis as for taught courses i.e. 1 credit  $\equiv$  36-40 hours of notional student effort (Recommendation 7 refers). [Issues that would need to be addressed include the possibility that a student could be required to register for more than the normal annual credit load and the possible consequential effect on the unit of resource; whether the credit accumulated by passing a vacation course could be used to satisfy progress requirements and/or compensate for failure in a taught course in terms of the requirements for satisfactory completion of a programme; the basis for credit-rating vacation courses which were not compulsory i.e. those which were only recommended as part of a programme].

**Approved.** Action: ASCs to take forward.

15. That the (undergraduate) Academic Standards Committees should consider limiting the maximum duration of vacation courses (e.g. field courses or work experience) which were a compulsory part of a programme to two weeks and that vacation study in excess of this period should only be "recommended". [No maximum duration should be stipulated for postgraduate courses as postgraduate taught students are required to be in attendance for 45 weeks].

**Approved, subject to Departments being permitted to make a case to the relevant ASC for exemption on an individual course basis.** *Action: Heads of Department and ASCs to note and action as appropriate.*

16. That the Academic Standards Committees be asked to review the planning cycle process to ascertain if it could be streamlined further without weakening the University's course and programme validation procedures. *[In doing so, the ASCs should take cognisance of the likely future requirements for information on subject benchmarks and programme specifications].*

**Approved.** *Action: ASCs to take forward.*

17. That staff be given clearer guidance on how their performance as Advisers might lead to recognition being given in the promotions exercise and that the Director of Personnel Services be asked to undertake appropriate consultation and seek approval for service as an Adviser of Studies to be included in the conditions of employment of academic staff. *[While modularisation had had no direct impact on the work of Regents for medical students, their work was acknowledged as being of equal importance in terms of the provision of pastoral support and guidance to students].*

**Approved.** *Action: Clerk to refer to Director of Personnel Services.*

18. That no change be made to the Class Certificate system i.e. Departments should continue to refuse Class Certificates where students failed to attend and duly perform the work prescribed for a course (including failure to submit in-course prescribed degree assessments where the published deadline for submission was within the 12-week teaching period for the relevant half-session), and that candidates should continue not to be permitted to present themselves for assessment in any course unless they had obtained a Class Certificate for that course.

**Senators expressed considerable disquiet at the recommendation that no change be made and were invited to submit their comments in writing to the Academic Registrar so that the matter could be re-considered by the UCTL.** *The UCTL (28 May 1999) considered a paper from Dr Townsend, with a supporting comment from Dr Kinnear (UCTL document 166, Appendix 1 refers) and a paper from the Deputy Clerk to the Senate which included a recommendation that the current Spring Term exercise be abandoned (document 167, Appendix 2 refers): the latter had been prepared following a request at Senate that the University considers abandoning the requirement for Departments to identify those students who had either been, or who were in danger of being, refused a Class Certificate by the end of the Spring Term. Also, the UCTL noted the ASC's conclusion from the first half-session course review exercise that poor student attendance at formal teaching sessions appeared to be a continuing (or possibly increasing) phenomenon.*

*The UCTL did not endorse Dr Townsend's proposal that entry to end-of-course assessment should not be related to possession of a valid Class Certificate and agreed that the Clerk should prepare a paper for the next meeting, to include the following:-*

- *the current practice relating to Class Certificates and how they were used by the University;*
- *proposals for how the current administrative burden of refusing Class Certificates (and their subsequent "re-instatement") might be reduced while nevertheless satisfying the purpose which Class Certificates currently served.*

*It was agreed that the Clerk, in preparing the above, should review, in consultation with the President of the SRC, the Class Certificate refusal letter currently sent by the Senate Office to students.*

*Also, the UCTL reiterated the current policy that there should be no timetabled work for any course during the University's prescribed revision and assessment periods: this included those courses which were assessed 100% by continuous assessment and for which there was no end-of-course written examination.*

*Furthermore, the Committee agreed to endorse the recommendations that, with effect from 1999/2000, (a) Departments should no longer be required to identify those students who had either been, or were in danger of being, refused a Class Certificate by the end of the Spring Term (i.e. the "C3" exercise); and (b) that grant cheques for the diminishing number of students who received maintenance awards should not be withheld at the start of either the Spring Term or the Summer Term. Notwithstanding the above, the Academic Section would continue to urge students deemed to be "at risk" at the end of the Winter Term or the Spring Term to meet with their Adviser of Studies and/or the Director of Studies (Advising), as appropriate.*

19. That the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF) Exercise should continue to be used to elicit feedback on all courses each year; that the Academic Standards Committees should consider identifying good practice and commending Departments in their reports, where appropriate; that Departments should consider adding a question to the SCEF to ask if the form for a particular course provided students with an adequate means of giving feedback; and that in an attempt to reduce the possibility of student questionnaire fatigue, Departments should consider whether or not their mechanisms for "closing the feedback loop" to students were as effective as possible. [One example of good practice was for course guides to highlight the changes implemented as a direct consequence of student feedback via the SCEF in previous sessions, where appropriate].

**While approving the Recommendation, it was agreed that the UCTL should consider undertaking a wider consultation on the most appropriate methods for carrying out course evaluation.** *It was proposed at the Senate that, rather than evaluating individual courses at honours level, means should be sought of securing individual programme evaluations. A further proposal was made that rather than undertake evaluation at the end of each course, consideration should be given to conducting year evaluations after students had had time to reflect maturely on their educational experiences. One Senator suggested that it should be a responsibility of class representatives to seek feedback from students on courses and to submit formal reports to the Staff:Student Liaison Committee. Another raised the possibility of validating the SCEF responses. The UCTL also considered a paper from Professor Bruce (Appendix 3 to UCTL document 166), which formed part of his recent first half-session course review report to the ASC (A&SS, D, L) on which he had stated that "staff (including HoD) see little or no value in the present SCEF exercise".*

**The UCTL reconsidered this issue and noted the following:-**

- *that the two undergraduate ASC Conveners considered that many Departments under their purview operated the course review procedures extremely efficiently and that few Departments had complained about the process, other than in regard to the operating problems which had been encountered this session and the apparent increase in poor student attendance at formal teaching sessions;*
- *that the two Deans present at the meeting were totally in favour of the SCEF exercise;*
- *that the President of the SRC considered that the Class Representative system this year had been very successful, and was an improvement on previous years;*

- *a concern that the anonymity of the forms might lead to students writing disparaging comments about individual staff. The UCTL noted that the requirement that individual SCEF forms should remain under the purview of the Head of Department, with only the SCEF summaries being submitted to the University committees, was stipulated in designing the SCEF procedures specifically to ensure that any comments made about an individual member of staff would be seen only by the Head of the Department who, as part of his/her management role, would determine whether or not any action should be taken. Anonymity also should ensure that students were not inhibited in providing feedback.*

*The Committee agreed that the Clerk should be asked to prepare proposals for the possible streamlining of the SCEF exercise while noting (a) the above comments, (b) the strong support of the Committee for the continuation of this exercise, and (c) the suggestion that the return of SCEF forms may be linked to the award of a Class Certificate.*

20. That the Academic Standards Committees, during the course and programme validation process, should attempt to identify any duplication or overlap in teaching between courses and ask the relevant Departments to liaise with one another in such instances. [It was hoped that this might lead to economies in staff time].

**Approved.** *Action: ASCs.*

## GENERAL ISSUES RAISED BY SENATORS

- (i) Concern was expressed that no general analysis had been undertaken of the costs and benefits of the introduction of the modular structure. It would have been helpful to have measured actual outcomes against those postulated when the University had taken the original decision to modularise.

**Senate was informed that the Working Party approached the review by seeking comments on the current system rather than commissioning a substantial project to measure the original objectives, which would have been costly to undertake. The UCTL agreed that no further action was required.**

- (ii) Anxiety was expressed at the extent of the bureaucracy involved by modularisation. **It was agreed that the UCTL should keep this under review**, though it was noted that most of the bureaucracy relating to academic quality assurance was externally imposed.

**The main concern was at the amount of paper required for submission in regard to course and programme validation. The UCTL agreed that while the ASCs should consider whether the current planning cycle proposal forms could be reduced, major changes should be deferred until the outcome of the QAA's new quality assurance and standards framework was known. [It was anticipated that programme specifications would be required indicating how subject benchmark standards (currently being prepared by the HE Sector) would be achieved and assessed. This could have implications for the University's validation procedures and the structure of the planning cycle forms].**

- (iii) The suggestion was made that consideration should be given to reviewing the present three-term structure with half-sessions super-imposed. **It was agreed that the UCTL would consider this**, although it was noted that an important constraint would be the UCAS proposals for a new post-entry qualification system.

*The UCTL agreed that this matter be reviewed once the outcome of the current UCAS consultation on a post-qualifications admissions system was known.*

- (iv) The view was put that research should be undertaken into determining whether or not modularisation had led to the encouragement of surface and rote learning, with the implicit view that it had. **This was agreed.**

*The UCTL noted that the modular structure provided for end-of-programme summative assessments to cover the entire programme but that few Departments availed themselves of this opportunity. Notwithstanding this, it was agreed that the Centre for Educational Research be asked to prepare a summary of published research on the impact of modularisation in regard to teaching, learning and assessment. This research would then be used to inform further debate on this issue, to include consideration of (a) the suggestion at the Senate that assessment might be detached from a course to allow, for example, the assessment for related first and second half-session courses to be combined so that both courses were assessed at the end of the second half-session and (b) the related issue [which was raised subsequently by a Head of Department] that some final year honours students could “coast” with impunity during the second half-session as a consequence of being informed of the outcome of course assessments in an incremental manner which allows students to calculate their likely degree classification from the Grade Spectrum.*

- (v) Concern was expressed at the barriers to cross-Faculty flexibility in course provision caused by different timetabling systems. It was noted that timetabling had posed a range of technical problems. The most basic were those caused by the conflicts between courses which were “blocked” and those which were “threaded”.

*The UCTL noted that possible solutions to these problems would be considered by the Assistant Secretary (Examinations & Timetabling) in regard to discussions with the Deans (Recommendation 5 refers).*

- (vi) Concern was expressed at the impact of teaching on local and national holidays during term-time, in particular the effect on both students and staff with child care responsibilities. Professor Macdonald indicated that this matter was already under consideration.

*The UCTL noted that this matter was being considered by the Personnel Policy Committee.*

- (vii) Surprise was expressed that no attempt had apparently been made to determine whether or not modular structures were an aid or hindrance to student recruitment. In response it was noted that applicants to the University often cited flexible degree structures as a key determinant in their choice of institution and that further information would be secured on attitudes of applicants to other institutions.

*The UCTL noted that this was being undertaken by the Director of Student Recruitment Services.*