

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2000

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Professor H Chandler, Professor PR Duff, Dr JH Farrington, Dr S Kunin, Dr WF Long, Mr R McGregor, Professor PA Racey, Professor LD Ritchie, Professor JG Simpson, Mr M Torrance and Professor DW Urwin, with Ms B Holohan, Mr JLA Madden, Dr T Webb and Ms M Strachan (Clerk).

Dr PW Bellarby attended for the item on Determination of Degree Classification: Engineering [see Minute 304].

Apologies for absence were received from Professor DF Houlihan, Mr J Leiper, Professor SD Logan and Professor PJ Sloane.

CONVENERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

301. The Committee recorded its thanks to Professor Macdonald, the former Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, for the significant contribution he had made in helping the University to enhance the quality of its teaching as Convener of the former Board of Studies in Arts & Social Sciences, as Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity, and as Convener of the UCTL.

MINUTES

302. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2000.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/229)

DRAFT UCTL REPORT TO THE SENATE, AND ASC

REPORTS TO THE UCTL

303.1 The Committee noted that it had been agreed that it would submit an annual report to the Senate on its activities and that, to inform the Committee's report, the three Academic Standards Committees would submit annual reports to the UCTL.

303.2 The Committee received reports from the Academic Standards Committees (ASC) relating to their activities in 1999/2000, and a draft UCTL report to the Senate, which summarised the major issues considered by the ASCs.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/231)

303.3 The Committee noted that the reports covered teaching learning, assessment and quality assurance issues, and agreed that the format of the four reports was helpful and appropriate.

303.4 It was agreed that the Committee should receive reports at future meetings on the following issues referred to in the report: communication and information technology skills (section 2.2) with particular reference to plans for implementation; the progress of the programme for promoting independent learning (section 3.2); the operation of the postgraduate structured management frameworks (section 4.10); and student transcripts and personal development planning (section 9.3).

Action: Clerk

303.5 The Convener reported that the University Management Group (UMG) had remitted to the Committee the task of investigating the problems of student retention. The Committee agreed that the Convener should discuss with the Academic Registrar the formation of a short-term working group to take the work forward and to formulate recommendations.

Action: JGR/TW

303.6 The UMG had also remitted to the Committee the task of investigating the concerns voiced by Professor Urwin and Dr Roach regarding the operation of the advising system with a view to bringing forward recommendations as to how these might be addressed.

Action: JGR/TW

303.7 The Committee approved the UCTL report to the Senate, subject to suggested amendments being made (attached as the appendix to this minute). It was agreed that, after its submission to the Senate, it should be made widely available to members of staff.

Action: Clerk

DETERMINATION OF DEGREE CLASSIFICATION: ENGINEERING

304.1 The Committee received a paper detailing the Department of Engineering's proposals for the application of the University grade spectrum for determining honours classification for the Degrees of Master of Engineering and Bachelor of Engineering with effect from academic year 2000/2001. The proposals had been discussed with the Convener of the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering & Medicine), who was content with the draft procedures.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/230)

304.2 The Committee approved the proposals and agreed that they be implemented for students entering the MEng and BEng Honours programmes (i.e. Programme Year 3) in

2000/01 and thereafter. It also noted that all departments were now using the grade spectrum for determining honours classification.

RESIT EXAMINATIONS FOR STUDENTS WHO SUBMIT MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

305.1 The Committee considered a proposal received from an academic department that students who submitted a medical certificate and who did not take the first (or second) half-session end of course written examinations should be given the opportunity to take the relevant examination(s) within term time, rather than having to wait until the August resit diet. It was further proposed that the procedures involved should be relatively informal.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/232)

305.2 The Committee agreed that the proposal should be rejected. Work for such examinations would interfere with students' work for courses currently being followed, which might result in academic appeals being submitted in regard to the latter. In addition, the use of "informal" procedures would lead to a lack of uniformity of practice and the possibility of some students being disadvantaged relative to others.

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW PROCEDURES FOR 2000/01

306. The Committee approved the following:-

- i. that the Convener be empowered to extend the deadline for submission of Internal Teaching Review Self-Evaluation Documents and Appendices (to include Programme Specifications, Curriculum Maps and Programme Review Reports) until 31 January 2001, if Departments made a case for being unable to comply with the normal deadline of 1 December 2000;

- (ii) that for the paper-based Reviews of seven Departments in 2000/2001, an external subject expert should not be appointed to the Panel as s/he would be unable to meet with the internal Panel members to discuss the Review. [An external subject expert would be appointed for those Reviews for which there would be a Panel visit.]

REPORTS FROM DEANS IN RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MODULAR STRUCTURE

1. The Committee approved the Report from the Deans of the Faculties of Science & Engineering and Medicine & Medical Sciences in regard to Recommendation 5 of the Review of the Undergraduate Modular Structure.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/233)

307.2 The Committee noted that Recommendation 6 of the Review stated that *The Deans of Arts & Divinity and of Social Sciences & Law be invited to comment on the implications of the above Plan (arising from Recommendation 5) in regard to the delivery and timetabling of courses within their Faculties and for the development of inter-disciplinary programmes across the University.* The relevant Deans would consider the Report from the Working Party established by the Faculties of Science & Engineering and Medicine & Medical Sciences, and would report to the UCTL in due course.

307.3 The Committee approved the response from the Deans of the four Faculties to Recommendations 8, 10, 11 and 12 of the Review of the Undergraduate Modular Structure.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/234)

WORKING PARTY ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS

(See Minute 284.2)

309. The Committee noted that, during academic year 2000/2001, the Working Party on Quality and Standards would conclude its remit by holding one further meeting and by submitting a report to the UCTL on class certificates.

Action: Clerk

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM (SCEF) EXERCISE

(See Minute 286.2)

310. The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity & Law) would consider the issue of how the utility of the SCEF exercise might be improved.

Action: Ms R Hale

FACILITIES FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS

(See Minute 291.5)

311. The Committee noted that the Deans would be requested to report to the next meeting regarding the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate)'s recommendations regarding conditions for postgraduate students.

Action: Clerk

CONVERSION OF MARKS AWARDED BY AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

(See Minute 300)

312. The Committee noted that a background report, with proposals as to how the matter might be taken forward, would be submitted to a future meeting.

Action: Clerk

REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP: 2000/01

313. The Committee noted its remit, composition and membership for the current session.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/235)

CLASSIFICATION OF DEGREES

314. The Committee noted that the Principal had agreed to support the creation of a Working Group to look at the alternatives to the current Honours classification system in light of the following extract from the informal record of a meeting of research-intensive universities held at The London School of Economics and Political Science on 30 May 2000:-

It was understood that the Russell Group and the 94 Group were discussing the future of the classified degree (though information from the latest Russell Group meeting did not suggest any particular attitudes). Those universities that had discussed it were increasingly against continuing the present system.

The difficulty was how to find a replacement. Transcripts were integral to any new system, but were not inconsistent with the present arrangements. There was interest in providing ranking against institutional name. We agreed that there was no point in proposing abandonment of classification unless there was a better system already identified.

We therefore agreed that each representative would canvass his/her head of institution with the intention of a joint working group being established between the Russell and 94 Groups to investigate alternatives to the current system and propose an alternative.

DESIGN OF CURRICULUM FOR ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY

PROGRAMME FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS (AUPHET)

315. The Committee noted the programme for newly appointed teaching staff at the University of Aberdeen which had been endorsed by University senior management. It was hoped that it could be implemented with effect from January 2001. It was suggested that it might be helpful for participants if a course book could be developed. The Committee agreed that it was essential that appropriate training be given to new University teachers. The Convener undertook to discuss further with Human Resources the timetable for implementation. *(copy filed as UCTL/131000/236)*

Action: JGR/BH

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS IN SCOTLAND: A POSITION PAPER

316.1 The Committee noted the University's response to the above position paper. A summary of the paper was also received for information.

(copy filed as UCTL/131000/237)

2. The main implications for the University of adopting the framework (subject to satisfactory resolution of the issues raised in the University's reply) would be a need to:-
 - a. review level 3 and 4 provision
 - b. review the outcomes of the MChem level 5 courses
 - c. revise the Regulations for some non-honours degrees
 - d. revise the University's credit-rating principles and convert all credits to the new tariff
 - e. devise level descriptors for HE levels 1-6

Action: TW

QUALIFICATIONS AND LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

317. The Committee noted that representatives of Scottish Universities had met recently to discuss the draft Qualification and Level Descriptors proposed by the QAA in conjunction with the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access, and which were included in the recently-published position paper. There was general discontent with the descriptors as currently proposed. Once the position became clearer and consensus was reached on generic descriptors, the Convener of the UCTL would establish a Working Group to prepare proposals for the Committee in regard to drafting level descriptors for use within the University.

Action: TW

TRAINING OF ITR PANELS

318. The Committee noted that the Convener, in conjunction with the Deans, would identify a cadre of academic staff to serve on Internal Teaching Review Panels. Appropriate training would then be arranged.

Action: TW

PREPARING FOR SUBJECT REVIEW

319. The Committee noted the following:-

- i. that the self-evaluation document for the Subject Review of Theology and Religious Studies in 2000/01 had been submitted to the QAA on 4 September 2000. The document incorporated Programme Specifications for the University's undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes: these could be downloaded from the Department of Divinity and Religious Studies' website at www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity;
- ii. that the self-evaluation document for the Subject Review of Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies was being prepared by the Department of Geology and Petroleum Geology, for submission by 31 October 2000. The review would take place between January-June 2001;
- iii. that Human Resources had arranged two lunch-time seminars, as indicated below, which Heads of Department and another representative would be invited to attend:-

Monday 9 October: Programme Specifications and Curriculum Maps

Monday 30 October: Self-Evaluation Documents and Internal Teaching Review.

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE

320. The Committee noted that Reports would be submitted to future meetings in regard to how the University's current policies and procedures related to the precepts and guidance in the following Sections in the QAA's Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality and Standards in Higher Education, which had been published recently:-

Section 4: External Examining

Section 5: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints on Academic Matters

Section 6: Assessment of Students

Section 7: Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

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

8 December 2000; 2 February 2001; 23 March 2001; 25 May 2001

MMS/LG

27.10.00

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