

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 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 LD Ritchie, Professor JG Simpson, Professor PJ Sloane, Mr M Torrance and Professor DW Urwin, with Mrs B Holohan, Professor E Matthews, Mrs M Park, Mr G Pryor, Mrs A Sage, Dr T Webb and Ms M Strachan (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Professor DF Houlihan, Mr J Leiper, Professor SD Logan, Professor PA Racey and Mr JLA Madden

MINUTES

322. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2000.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/238)

SPACE MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING TIMETABLING

323.1 The Committee received a paper from Mrs Park, which outlined the proposal to replace the current STARS system for allocating teaching space. Mrs Park had consulted widely in the Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law but had not been directly involved in the consultations in the Faculties of Medicine & Medical Sciences and Science & Engineering. She agreed to consult members of the latter two herself, while emphasising that suggestions already received from those Faculties had informed the planning for the replacement software.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/239)

323.2 The Committee suggested that it would be helpful if the draft input form were to be attached to the paper together with information useful for prospective first-time users of a replacement system.

Action: MIP

323.3 The Committee approved the recommendations that:

1 the University continue to evaluate the software package with a view to purchasing the one selected by the end of February 2001;

2 the teaching timetable, in future, be undertaken centrally with days, times and rooms being allocated automatically with no reference to historical teaching slots;

3 the teaching timetable should be undertaken for the whole session rather than for each individual half-session, as currently. This would provide a complete teaching timetable for a whole session before teaching started in September;

1. the changes to the Course Catalogue should (if feasible) be made for the 2001/2002 publication;

2. a Project Board and User Group be established for the project.

ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL EXAMINING

Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education

324.1 The Committee noted that the following documents had been circulated:

* The extent of the University's current compliance, and suggested action where appropriate, in regard to the following sections of the QAA's Code of Practice:

Section 4 External
Examining

Section 6 Assessment
of Students

* Revised drafts of the following sections of the Academic Quality Handbook:

Section 7 Assessment and Examination Policies and
Practices: Taught Courses and Programmes

Section 9 External
Examining: Taught
Courses and
Programmes

A revised version of the Report Form for External Examiners for First Degrees and
for Taught Master's Degrees

(copies filed as UCTL/081200/240a,b and 241a,b,c)

2. The Committee noted the need to review and, where necessary, revise procedures in order to satisfy the University that it was meeting the expectations set out in the Code's precepts. It was also necessary to revise the Academic Quality Handbook to reflect those revisions and to incorporate other standard procedures.
3. After a wide-ranging discussion, it was agreed that detailed examination of the proposed revisions should be referred to a small Working Group to be convened by Dr Roberts and comprising the Conveners of the Undergraduate Programme Committees, Dr Webb, Mr McGregor and the Clerk. The Group would report to the February 2001 meeting of the UCTL.

Action: Clerk

C&IT SKILLS

325.1 The Committee noted that it might not be possible for all Faculties to guarantee that, by the time students graduated, they would have acquired all the skills detailed in the C&IT skills policy approved by the Senate. Many degree programmes would not demand the whole suite of skills and, while free-standing self-taught modules had much to commend them, the acquisition of a given skill could only be guaranteed if it were formally assessed.

325.2 It was agreed that the issue should be investigated further by a small working group to be convened by Professor Urwin and comprising the Conveners of the Undergraduate Programme Conveners or their alternates, the Vice-President (Representation) of the Students' Association, and Mrs Torrance.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/242)

Action: Clerk

**ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PROGRAMME FOR
HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS (AUPHET)**

326. Dr Roberts reported that, due to staffing difficulties, the start of the AUPHET programme would be postponed until September 2001. The three-day course, *Introduction to Teaching and Learning*, would be available in January 2001.

ADVISING AND STUDENTS' PROGRESS REVIEW WORKING GROUP

327. The Committee approved the proposed remit and membership of the Advising and Students' Progress Working Group, which would be convened by Dr Roberts. It was proposed that an oral report would be submitted to the UCTL on 2 February 2001 with the final report to follow on 23 March.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/243)

Action: Clerk

NORTH AMERICAN EXCHANGE SCHEME

328. The Committee approved the recommendation regarding further information to be sought and further recommendations to be brought forward with reference to the North American exchange scheme.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/244)

Action: Clerk

UCTL REPORT TO THE SENATE

(Minute 307 of 13.10.00)

329. The Committee noted an extract from the unconfirmed Senate minutes for 15 November 2000 summarising discussion of the UCTL report to the Senate.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/245)

CONVENER OF SUB-COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES

330. The Committee noted that the Convener of the Sub-Committee on Disabilities would henceforth be invited to be in attendance at meetings of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.

**STUDENT RETENTION WORKING GROUP: WORKING PARTY
ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

331.1 The Committee noted that the Convener had approved the remit and membership of the Student Retention Working Group, which would be convened by Professor Sloane.

331.2 The Committee noted that the issue of class certificates, which was to have been considered by the Working Party on Quality and Standards, had been referred to the Student Retention Working Group and that, therefore, the former had been disbanded.

331.3 Professor Sloane tabled a paper which compared withdrawal figures for undergraduates by Faculty over the last five academic years. At its first meeting, the Working Group had identified a number of issues that needed further investigation. An interim report would be submitted to the UCTL on 2 February 2001 with the final report to follow on 23 March.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/246)

Action: PS

FACILITIES FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

332.1 The Committee noted responses from the four Faculties regarding facilities for postgraduate students.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/247)

2. A response to the above, from Professor Racey, was tabled. It was agreed that the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) should consider the matter further and report back to the UCTL.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/247)

Action: PAR

LTU REPORT

333. The Committee noted the report from the LTU, which had also been considered by the Information Management Committee on 30 November 2000. The Committee agreed that its thanks be conveyed to the LTU for an interesting and comprehensive report.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/248)

Action: Clerk

STUDY INTO THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC

PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE

334. The Committee noted the report regarding the JISC study into the impact of electronic plagiarism detection software.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/249)

GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STUDENTS WHO EITHER FAIL, OR WHO FAIL TO

ATTEND OR COMPLETE, AN ELEMENT OF PRESCRIBED

DEGREE ASSESSMENT (Minute 287 of 26.05.00)

335. The Committee noted that, following further discussion with the Department of Psychology, it had been decided that there was no need at present for the Convener to write to the British Psychological Society (BPS), as previously minuted. It was now understood that the introduction of a separately-titled honours degree to be awarded to students who qualified for the award of honours but who had not passed the dissertation would satisfy BPS requirements.

REVISED DRAFT FRAMEWORK FOR QUALIFICATIONS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

336. The Committee noted the main changes that had been made to the revised draft Framework for Qualifications of the Higher Education Institutions in Scotland which had been amended following consideration of the issues raised in response to the Position Paper on the Qualifications Framework for Scotland circulated earlier this year. The revision was judged to be helpful. It was agreed that, if further comment were considered appropriate, Dr Roberts and Dr Webb should respond to the QAA on behalf of the Committee to whom a copy of the response, if any, would be circulated.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/250)

Action: JGR, TW

[Note by Clerk: Copy of the response is included as an appendix to this Minute.]

‘e-UNIVERSITY’ PROJECT: BUSINESS MODEL

337. The University received SHEFC circular letter HE/38/00 of 13 October 2000, ‘e-University’ Project: Business Model (which could be read at: www.shefc.ac.uk/shefc/PUBLICAT/CIRCS/00/he3800.html). The Committee noted the brief analysis by the Director, DISS, of the business model study prepared for HEFCE by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

(copy filed as UCTL/081200/251)

REVIEW OF INFORMATION GIVEN TO STUDENTS CONCERNING FINAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION AND HONOURS DISSERTATIONS

338. The Committee noted that the undergraduate Academic Standards Committees had agreed that, in the light of the increasing number of appeals against final degree classification, they would review both the information given to students regarding final degree classification and the guidance on the preparation, supervision and assessment of honours dissertations

CLASS REPRESENTATIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY:

REVIEW BY THE STUDENTS’ ASSOCIATION

339. The Committee noted that the Students’ Association were currently undertaking a review of the University’s Class Representative system and were consulting interested parties. The Convener, in consultation with the Academic Registrar, would respond to the Students’ Association before the deadline of 20 December 2000. Members wishing to make comments were invited to return them as soon as possible to Dr Webb.

Action: TW, JGR

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS (ALL AT 2.00 P.M.)

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

Friday 2 February 2001

Friday 23 March 2001

Friday 25 May 2001

UCTLMEET5/mindec00

Appendix to Minute 336

18 December 2000

Mr NL Sharp

Head of the QAA Scottish Office

183 St Vincent Street

GLASGOW

G2 5QD

Dear Norman

THE FRAMEWORK FOR QUALIFICATIONS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

I am writing further to your letter to the Principal of 27 November 2000 concerning the Framework for Qualifications of the HEIs in Scotland.

While we are very pleased to see that the QAA has addressed many of the issues raised in the consultation, we are dismayed to note that you have not addressed our concern in regard to the minimum amount of credit linked to the Honours (and Master's) degree.

An extract from my letter to you of 27 September 2000 is reproduced below, which reiterates our concerns:-

"(d) **The minimum amount of credit linked to the various qualifications is, in some cases, inappropriate.** For example, while students embarking on an Honours programme generally will have obtained 240 credits at SHE 1 and 2, our Regulations provide for students to be awarded an Honours degree without necessarily passing all elements of their Honours assessment. Limited condonement of failure allows for a student to be awarded a Lower Second or Third Class Honours degree without achieving all of the credits they have studied. And the Regulations provide for a student to be awarded an Honours degree if they had missed elements of Honours assessment on account of illness or other good cause. In these cases, the examiners, including the External Examiners, may consider that a student's overall performance in their Honours programme merits the award of an Honours degree without necessarily passing all 240 credits at SHE 3 and 4 of their Honours programme: such students would therefore be awarded an Honours degree having achieved less than the 480 credits minimum stipulated in the proposed Framework. Our rationale for condoning a limited proportion of failure in an Honours (or postgraduate taught) programme is that, in order to maintain academic standards, only the first attempt at the assessment at these levels contributes to the overall award. It would be iniquitous to require an undergraduate student who failed certain elements of Honours assessment to take a resit examination (which might require them to extend the normal duration of their programme) simply to achieve the minimum number of credits to comply with the Qualifications Framework when the resit result would not affect the degree classification. And it would be unfair on other students, as well as lowering standards, if some students were permitted to improve their degree classification by counting a resit result."

We cannot find any reference to the above concern in the results of the consultation exercise on the position paper. We accept that the Framework repeatedly indicates that it is not intended to be a "straightjacket". And we accept that Section 2 of the Framework (the draft guidelines to institutions) indicates that "institutions should ensure that ... assessment procedures that permit compensation or condonation are not applied in a way that might allow a qualification to be awarded without achievement of the full outcomes being demonstrated". While one might argue that the latter would address our concerns, the repeated use of "minimum expectations" in terms of overall volume of credit contradicts any such interpretation.

The Framework stipulates that the minimum credit requirement for the Scottish Honours degree is 480 credits. The majority of students study 120 credits each year. If we take, as an example, a student who enters the final "fourth" year of their Honours degree programme having achieved 360 credits in their first three years, is the QAA indicating that the student must pass all of their final year 120 credits in order to achieve the 480 minimum number? If this is the case, then please would you confirm that the QAA would expect, for example, a student who fails one of their final year second semester modules (say of 30 credits) in June not to be permitted to graduate, in spite of having achieved, say, 90 credits at SHE 4 and a total of 450 credits? If so, the QAA would be imposing additional financial burdens on students by, in effect, preventing them from entering the graduate job market at that point and requiring them to possibly repeat part of their studies. In addition, the QAA would be questioning the academic judgement of those of our External Examiners who have recommended awards of Honours degrees (albeit at no higher an award than a Lower Second Class degree) to students who had failed some of their modules but who had nevertheless

satisfied the Examiners that they had achieved the outcomes for the award of an Honours degree. In such cases, our Regulations indicate that students are "deemed to have satisfied the credit requirements for the award of the degree": we do not "give" the credits to students for those failed modules, which would be inappropriate.

Our reasons for not permitting resits at Honours or postgraduate taught level are reiterated above (paragraph 3 refers). We have used our "*Grade Spectrum*" approach to determining degree classification across the entire institution for several years and it is one of our primary mechanisms for securing and maintaining academic standards: is the QAA requiring the University to abandon its *Grade Spectrum* approach to determining degree classification by insisting on, for example, that students must pass a minimum of 480 credits before they can be awarded an Honours degree? These are important issues for the University and I look forward to receiving your response.

Also, please could you let me know if you are aware, through institutional audits, of the practices of other institutions: do institutions permit resits at Honours and, if so, does the resit result contribute to degree classification? If it does, we would argue that that would lead to a lowering of academic standards.

Yours sincerely

Dr JG Roberts

Vice-Principal, Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity

Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning