UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2001

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Professor HW Chandler, Dr JH Farrington, Professor DF Houlihan, Dr SD Kunin, Dr WF Long, Professor PA Racey, Professor LD Ritchie, Professor PJ Sloane, Mr M Torrance and Professor DW Urwin with Dr A Chadwick, Mr G Pryor, Dr T Webb, Professor E Matthews and Ms MM Strachan (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Leiper, Professor SD Logan, Mr R McGregor, Professor JG Simpson and Mr JLA Madden

MINUTES

341. The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2000.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/252)

ADVISING AND STUDENTS' PROGRESS REVIEW WORKING GROUP

342.1 Dr Roberts reported that, at its first meeting on 26 January 2001, the Working Group had agreed with the view that advising students was a specialist task, requiring interest and commitment, and that, therefore, not all members of academic staff should be required to be Advisers of Studies. Student numbers had risen greatly in recent years and it was expected that the role of the Adviser would have to expand. It would be necessary to appoint more Advisers, not least to improve student retention rates. In order to improve retention of Advisers, there was a need to increase the status, recognition and reward attached to the role. It had been noted that the role of Adviser was different in Arts and in Science.

342.2 In the course of discussion, the following views were expressed and assurance was given that they would be further considered by the Working Group:-

- there was merit in requiring most academic staff to be Advisers. In addition, being an Adviser helped academic staff understand better how the University worked;
- there was merit in students having an Adviser from their stated area of study who remained with them throughout their degree programme;
- there was merit in having, even if unofficially, a perceived link between Departments and Advisers;

- advising should become a criterion for promotion. It was noted that a separate working party, convened by Professor Macdonald, was considering such issues.

C&IT SKILLS WORKING GROUP

1. The Committee Received a report from the C&IT Skills Working Group.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/253)

343.2 Professor Urwin spoke to the report, noting that, in the Faculties of Medicine & Medical Sciences and Science & Engineering, the basic and intermediate C&IT skills detailed in the policy approved by the Senate were already embedded in courses, as were most of the advanced skills. The Faculties of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law wished to have provision for C&IT skills separate from course teaching and it was expected that basic and intermediate skills would be taught in a course for entrants to be given in Week 1 of the academic year. The teaching material for that course would be put on the University website for use by Departments. However, the provision of teaching in advanced C&IT skills posed greater problems for Departments in Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law. While some could be embedded in courses, others could not. It was expected that appropriate material would be available on the website for use by Departments in teaching sessions dedicated to the acquisition of skills that could not be embedded within a given course. The Working Group was aware that the recommendations in its report had resource implications.

343.3 In a wide-ranging discussion, the view was expressed that a requirement to teach C&IT skills not needed for a given course would distort the nature of that course and that the Senate policy document might need to be revisited. However, it was also noted that the Senate policy had been approved independent of discipline. Within the next few years, Scottish students would acquire many of the C&IT skills covered by the Senate policy as part of their Highers programme. In the meantime, their acquisition was important for all students.

343.4 The Working Group was invited to consider the views expressed and to report back to the UCTL. Committee members were invited to submit comments in writing to the Clerk.

Action: DU, MMS

STUDENT RETENTION WORKING GROUP

344.1 The Committee received an interim report from the Student Retention Working Group.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/254)

344.2 Professor Sloane noted that, in order to achieve a clear and continuing view of retention figures, the University needed to improve the availability of speedy, reliable management information. The work that had already been done by the Group indicated that wastage rates at the transition points between student programme years varied widely between disciplines and it would be necessary to talk to Departments to understand what lay behind such variations. Poor qualifications on entry correlated with problems experienced later on, there was a high correlation between A levels and class of degree attained, and there were higher wastage rates in quantitative subjects than in non-quantitative ones. Professor Sloane considered that the provision of modest funding for econometric analysis to be carried out by the Department of Economics would be productive in identifying the type of student

most likely to be at risk. The Committee agreed that it would support an appropriate proposal to be submitted to the University Management Group.

Action: PS

344.3 Professor Sloane also noted that Professor Lee's suggestion that credits rather than time be used to determine progress had much to commend it, especially with growing numbers of part-time students, although there would be issues to be resolved were such a change to be introduced. The Group questioned whether Class Certificates still served a useful purpose, although some Committee members pointed out that Class Certificates were of assistance in framing reports to agencies such as the SAAS regarding student attendance. The Student Retention Working Group shared the view of the Working Group on Advising that more, and more proactive, Advisers of Studies were needed, but the former Group considered that the Adviser should be from the student's discipline.

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEWS

345.1 The Committee received proposals relating to the Internal Teaching Review procedures which had been drafted following discussion at a recent training session for Internal Teaching Review Panel members.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/255)

345.2 The Committee approved the recommendation that, in view of the alignment of Internal Teaching Reviews (ITRs) with the requirements of QAA Subject Review and the time constraints on Panel visits, ITRs should in future no longer relate to research student training. It agreed that the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) be asked to consider an alternative mechanism for monitoring this provision.

Action: PAR, TW

345.3 The Committee also approved the recommendations that the Convener and Clerk should tour the Department rather than the whole ITR Panel doing so and that a standard schedule for Panel visits be adopted.

345.4 The Committee approved the recommendation that, to help Departments in drafting QAA Subject Review documentation, they should at the start of the process submit the overall aims of their provision for comment to Faculty Planning Committees via the relevant Dean prior to drafting their Self-Evaluation Document.

Action: TW

LEARNING TECHNOLOGY UNIT

346. The Committee agreed that the Learning Technology Unit provided support to academic staff that could not otherwise readily and efficiently be given and noted that the Medicine & Medical Sciences CAL Unit was nationally recognised. While resource constraints were acknowledged, it was a strategic aim to help staff with the use of learning technology in teaching. The Committee supported the LTU in its application for further funding.

ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK SECTION 7: ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION

ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK SECTION 9: EXTERNAL EXAMINING

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORT FORM

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE: SECTION 6 - ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE: SECTION 4 - EXTERNAL EXAMINING

347.1 On the recommendation of the Working Group on the QAA Code of Practice, the Committee approved the revisions of Sections 7 and 9 of the Academic Quality Handbook and of the External Examiners' Report Form.

(copies filed as UCTL/020201/257-259)

347.2 The Committee noted the analysis of the University's compliance with Sections 6 and 4 of the QAA Code of Practice and approved the recommendations contained therein. These would be forwarded to the Senate, where appropriate.

(copies filed as UCTL/020201/260&261)

Action: TW

3. The Committee noted that a draft document outlining the current University position with regard to the QAA Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities would be considered by the Sub-Committee on Disabilities on 5 February. A report would subsequently be brought to the UCTL.

Action: LF

PROGRESS FILE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

348. The Committee approved the proposed remit and composition of the Working Group on a Progress File for Higher Education.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/263)

Action: Clerk

QAA CODE OF PRACTICE: ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT

COMPLAINTS ON ACADEMIC MATTERS

349.1 The Committee noted that an analysis of the University's compliance with the Code and proposals for any needed revision of present practice were in preparation.

2. The Committee approved the recommendation that the analysis and draft proposals be referred in the first instance to a Working Group comprising the Convener, the members of the two Senate Academic Appeals Committees and the SA Vice-President (Representation) for comment. The material would then be considered by the University Management Group to ensure that Court-related issues were taken into consideration. Recommendations would then be brought back to the Committee.

Action: Clerk

PROMOTING INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROGRAMME

350.1 The Committee noted the report on the first two years of the project. It was agreed that, as the promotion of independent learning was a key element of the University's Strategic Plan, the Convener should in future be more closely associated with the project Steering Group than had been the case in the past.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/264)

Action: JGR, AC

350.2 Dr Chadwick agreed to circulate Appendix I to the report and a membership list of the project Steering Group to the Committee.

Action: AC

CLASS REPRESENTATIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: REVIEW BY

THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

351. The Committee noted the response to the review sent on their behalf by the Convener, in consultation with the Academic Registrar.

(copy filed as UCTL/020201/265)

NORTH AMERICAN EXCHANGE SCHEME

352. The Committee noted that Heads of Department had been invited to comment on current mechanisms both for choosing North American partner institutions and programmes and for converting North American marks. Draft proposals for the revision of present practice would be prepared in light of responses received.

Action: Clerk

CONSULTATION ON SHEFC QUALITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

353.   The Committee noted that the Senate had endorsed the University's draft response to the Consultation on SHEFC Quality Enhancement Strategy. A copy of the final response would be posted on the University's website.

Action: TW

SPACE MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING TIMETABLE

354.   The Committee noted that the proposals in regard to the implementation of a new teaching timetabling system that were approved at the last meeting had been discussed by the Senate on 24 January 2001. Some reservations had been expressed in regard to full implementation of the proposals, and alternative suggestions were made. The Senate agreed that Professor Macdonald should consider the alternative suggestions, in consultation with those who would be responsible for implementing the new system, and report back to the Senate at its next meeting.

QAA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

355. The Committee noted that the QAA Institutional Review would be undertaken during Spring 2004.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

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

23 March 2001

25 May 2001