

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2002

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Mr D Donaldson, Professor PR Duff, Professor JH Farrington, Miss A Harper, Dr WF Long, Ms C Macaslan, Professor M Player, Professor LD Ritchie, Professor AA Rodger, Professor JG Simpson, Professor PJ Sloane, Professor IR Torrance and Professor DW Urwin with Dr D Comber, Mr JLA Madden, Mrs M Park, Mr G Pryor, Ms L Smith, Dr T Webb and Dr G Mackintosh (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Dr A Clarke, Mr D Cockburn, Professor SD Logan, Professor PA Racey and Professor E Matthews

455. The Convener welcomed Mr D Donaldson who had been recently appointed as Education and Training Convener for the Students' Association.

MINUTES

1. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2001 subject to the amendment of Mr D Donaldson for Mr C Buchanan in the list of those who attended the meeting.

(copy filed as UCTL/071201/307)

2. The Committee noted that the final report from the Working Group on Careers Guidance had not yet been considered by the Senate as the meeting on 23 January 2002 had been cancelled (minute 441 refers). It would be considered by the Senate on 27 February 2002.

CHANGES TO TEACHING POOL ACCOMMODATION

1. The Committee received a paper detailing recommendations from a meeting held with all Deans on 11 January 2002 at which proposals to make changes to teaching pool accommodation were considered.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/327)

2. The Committee also received a paper detailing revisions to the proposals made following the meeting with Deans (minute 457.1 refers). These revisions had been made following a meeting with DISS, Audio-Visual and Facilities Management.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/308)

1. The Convener informed the Committee that the UCTL was being invited to support these recommendations which would be funded, subject to funds being available, from Capital funds from DISS/Facilities Management.
2. Mr Pryor informed the Committee that, following the meeting of DISS/Audio-Visual/Facilities Management, it had been agreed that the work on F90 in Edward Wright should be deferred.

DISS was moving from a five to a four-year cycle for replacing PCs. He further informed the Committee that while work on F90 would be deferred, it was hoped that it would be possible to carry out additional improvements to video projector facilities in lecture theatres.

3. The Committee agreed that, in view of the changes outlined in the tabled paper outlining the revisions proposed by DISS/Audio-Visual/Facilities Management, that it would be appropriate to give Faculties a further opportunity to consider these revised proposals and to feedback any additional comments to the Convener by mid-March.

Action: Deans

STUDENTS' PROGRESS REGULATIONS

1. The Committee received a paper detailing further revisions to the Students' Progress Regulations which had been drafted following a joint meeting of all Undergraduate Programme Committees held on 10 January 2002 at which Recommendation 2 of the *Registry Review of Academic Administration in regard to Students' Progress, Advising and Registration* had been considered.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/329)

2. The Committee also received a paper from the Students' Association detailing their views on the proposed revision to Students' Progress Regulations.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/330)

3. The Convener informed the Committee that following the joint UPC meeting on 10 January 2002, a further meeting had been held at which revision to the original proposals to relax the Students' Progress Regulations had been discussed. These revisions had been made to accommodate the view that degrees should be awarded for achievement of Learning Outcomes while also addressing the concerns of those who were concerned that a relaxation of the progress regulations would lead to a diminution of standards.

4. The revised proposals had been circulated to all UPC members and members had been invited to pass any comments to their UPC Convener so that their views could be reported to the UCTL. The Convener invited the UPC Conveners to outline the views of their UPC.

Law

The Convener of UPC (Law) confirmed that he was content with the compromise set out in the revised proposals. However, he queried why the credit requirements in the regulations governing termination of study (revised General Regulation 17.1) of 16, 40, 60 credits were being retained and proposed that it might be more appropriate to move to a system where students are required to achieve 24 credits after two year's attendance, 48 credits after four years and 72 credits after six years to avoid having their study discontinued.

Science, Arts and Social Sciences, Medicine

The Conveners of these three UPCs had no further comments.

Engineering

The Convener of UPC (Engineering) noted that he was pleased that the revised proposals would allow more stringent progress requirements to be stipulated in the Supplementary Regulations for those degrees accredited by PSBs.

Students' Association

The Vice-President (Representation) of the Students' Association confirmed that the Students' Association had no objection to the revised proposals. She further noted that the Students' Association would be interested to see the proposals for increased monitoring of students' progress.

5. In regard to the proposal from the Convener of UPC (Law) that the credit requirements set out in the regulations governing termination of study (new Regulation 17.1), the Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to increase the credit requirements to 24 credits after two year's attendance, 48 credits after four year's attendance and 72 credits after six year's attendance.
6. The Committee approved the amendments to the General Regulations subject to the relevant amendments being made to take account of the revisions proposed in minute 458.5.
7. It was agreed that the proposed changes to the General Regulations, as approved by the UCTL, would be circulated to all UPC members who would be invited to consider these changes and to respond to the Clerk by Monday 18 February at the latest in order that the proposals could be considered by the Senate at its meeting on 27 February 2002.

Action: Clerk

COMPOSITION OF SENATE AND COURT APPEALS COMMITTEES

1. The Committee received a paper detailing proposed revisions to the composition of the Court and Senate Academic Appeals Committees to incorporate a student member on each Committee.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/331)

2. The Committee also received a further paper detailing additional recommendations to revise the composition of the Court and Senate Academic Appeals Committees which had been drafted in response to comments made by members of the Working Group on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints who had reviewed the paper referred to in minute 459.1 above.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/338)

3. At the meeting of the Committee on 7 December 2001, the Committee had approved, in principle, the proposal to include a student member on the Court Appeals Committee. In the light of this decision, it had been agreed that consideration should be given to whether the student representative should be an additional member of the Committee or whether the student representative should replace one of the existing members with a membership of three being maintained. In response to this, a proposal had been made that there should be four members and that the student representative should be the President of the Students' Association. Following circulation of this proposal to the Working Group on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints, it had been commented that the proposed quorum of four could present practical difficulties as the Committees would be unable to meet if the President of the Students' Association were unavailable. In the light of this comment, it had been further proposed that the quorum of the Court Academic Appeals Committee should be reduced to three which would allow the Committee to still meet if the President of the Students' Association were not available. The Committee approved this revised proposal.
4. The Disciplinary Procedures allow for a student to object against there being a student member on the panel. It had been proposed that a similar clause ought to be included in the composition of the Court and Senate Academic Appeals Committees. The Committee approved the proposed amendments as detailed below:-

Court Academic Appeals Committee

The Committee will be quorate provided that three members are present. **(The appellant also may insist that the Committee does not include a student member.)**

Senate Academic Appeals Committee

The Committee will be quorate provided that the Convener and at least three other members are present, one of whom must be the student member (**unless the appellant insists that the Committee does not include a student member**).

5. The Committee noted the proposal that it should be explicitly stated that members of the Committee cannot have had any prior involvement in a case and agreed that a formal item on declaration of interests should be included on the agendas for all meetings of Court and Senate Academic Appeals Committees, as detailed below:-

Declaration of interests: Any member of the Committee who has had a prior involvement in an appeal being heard by the Committee should declare this in advance of the meeting to the Clerk. Any such member will not be permitted to serve on the Committee hearing that appeal.

6. At the meeting on 7 December 2001, it was noted that the Students' Association may also wish to recommend inclusion of a student member on the Senate Academic Appeals Committee. In the light of this, the UCTL was invited to consider extending student representation to the Senate Academic Appeals Committee. This proposal was being made since the underlying reason for including a student representative on the Court Appeals Committee was to increase openness and enhance student confidence in the system. However, as relatively few appeals are heard by the Court Appeals Committee, it would be appropriate to extend student representation to the Senate Appeals Committee.

7. There followed a wide-ranging discussion in regard to the proposal to extend student representation to the Senate Academic Appeals Committee, the main points of this discussion being:-

- Student representation on Academic Appeals Committees could be considered as "tokenism" as it would be unlikely that the student member would be able to significantly affect the vote.
- Inclusion of a student member may be counter-productive in that it may affect the nature of the Committee and lead to the creation of "constituencies" on the Committee.
- One role of the Students' Association is to represent students. By including a student member on the Appeals Committee, there would be a conflict of interests in that the student member could be both representing the student and sitting on a Committee judging the student.
- The President of the Students' Association would be sitting on the Court Appeals Committee as a full member of the Court and not as a student representative.
- The current composition of Appeals Committees can appear to students to be students versus academics. Inclusion of a student member on the Committee would help to redress this.
- Only the Vice-President (Representation) of the Students' Association deals with student appeals and all such cases are dealt with in strict confidence. The student members of the Appeals Committees would therefore have no conflict of interests.
- Why has the option for a member of the University Court to act as Convener of the Court Appeals Committee been deleted? In some high profile cases, it may be appropriate to have the option of having the Committee convened by someone who is not quite so readily associated with the University.

- The Rector and the Rector's Assessor are also members of the Court who are appointed to represent the student body. The student member of the Court Appeals Committee could therefore be either the Rector, the Rector's Assessor or the President of the Students' Association. This would more clearly indicate that the student member was serving on the Court Appeals Committee as a member of the Court and not as a representative of the Students' Association.
 - Students are clearly stated to be full members of the Senate and the Court and as such, they should have an equal right to sit on Court and Senate Appeals Committees.
 - While the student member may not be able to significantly affect a vote, in most cases the decision of the Appeals Committees is reached following discussion and the views of the student member would help inform this debate.
 - In criminal law, the membership of the Court hearing a case increases as the case passes through the different stages of appeal. In view of this, would it be appropriate to consider having a larger number of members on the Court Appeals Committee.
1. In the light of these discussions, it was proposed that it would be appropriate to refer the issue of student membership of Court and Senate Appeals Committees back to the Working Group on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints for further debate. In a vote, this proposal was carried.
 2. In order to inform discussion at the Working Group on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints, a vote was taken to ascertain the view of the members of the UCTL regarding the proposal to have student membership of the Senate Appeals Committee. 8 members supported the proposal, and 3 opposed the proposal.
 3. It was agreed that the Working Group on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints would be invited to meet before the March meeting of the UCTL to consider the following issues:-
 - Whether the composition of the Court Appeals Committee should allow for the Convener to also be a member of the Court and not just a Vice-Principal or Dean.
 - Whether student representation should be extended to the Senate Academic Appeals Committees.
 - Whether the composition of the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee should be revised to allow for there to be an appropriate gender balance.
 - Whether the student member of the Court Appeals Committee should be drawn from the Rector, the Rector's Assessor or the President of the Students' Association.
 - Whether the size of the Court Appeals Committee should be increased to reflect the practice in the Law courts.

Action: Clerk

WORKING GROUP ON ADVISING AND STUDENTS' PROGRESS REVIEW

1. The Committee received an interim report from the Working Group on Advising and Students' Progress Review.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/331)
2. The Convener drew the Committee's attention to the draft job descriptions for Advisers of Studies, UPC Conveners and Directors of Studies (Advising), which the Committee was invited to approve.

3. It was proposed, in regard to the job description for Advisers of Studies, that it would be appropriate for the Careers and Appointments Service to be involved in the training of Advisers of Studies. Advisers could be provided with some basic information regarding employability and encouraged to direct their students to the Careers and Appointments Service for further advice.
4. It was further suggested that there was a lack of a communication route from Advisers to senior management. It was agreed that this was an issue to be addressed by Faculties but that it would be appropriate for the annual reports prepared by the Directors of Studies (Advising) to be copied by the UPCs to the relevant Faculties.

Action: Clerk

5. The Committee approved the three job descriptions.
6. The Convener informed the Committee that the University Management Group had considered the proposal for a 0.5 secondment for the Convener of the UPC (Arts & Social Sciences) and a 0.3 secondment for the Convener of the UPC (Science), at their meeting on 28 January 2002. The UMG had, following discussion, agreed that the issue should be referred to the Senior Vice-Principal. The Convener and the Academic Registrar would be taking the matter forward with Lord Sewel.

Action: JGR/TW

7. The Convener informed the Committee that the UMG had considered the response from the University's Solicitors in regard to the issue of amending academic contracts to reflect the proposal that advising should be regarded as a normal part of every academic's duties. The UMG was not comfortable with entering into negotiation with the AAUT in regard to this issue as it would set a precedent in that any change in duties would require negotiation with the AAUT.
8. The Committee approved the proposal that Deans should be invited to review Adviser remuneration, including Advisers of Studies for non-graduating students and that Adviser remuneration should be extended to include Advisers of Studies for Socrates/Erasmus students.

Action: Deans

9. The Convener informed the Committee that it would be unlikely that the new system would be in place by the start of session 2002/03. It was agreed that, despite this, Deans should be invited to try to reduce the full-time advising load from the current figure of 60 students towards the agreed target of 40 students.

10. The Committee approved the proposal that the Undergraduate Programme Committee in Arts & Social Sciences should be invited to review their current policy of random allocation of advisees to non-Honours MA Advisers and should consider moving towards a system of departmental allocation and should report back to the UCTL. The Convener of UPC (Arts & Social Sciences) confirmed that the Committee would consider this issue but that it would be difficult due to the flexibility of the MA system to achieve 100% departmental allocation. He suggested that a more appropriate way forward would be to aim to ensure that a certain portion of the advisees appointed to each Adviser were from the Adviser's area of study.

Action: DU

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

1. The Committee received a paper detailing proposals in regard to the Quality Enhancement Strategy.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/333)

2. The Convener informed the Committee that as a condition of the main teaching grant for 2002/03, SHEFC requires all institutions that it funds to submit a Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES) by June 2002. It is for institutions to decide whether the QES is incorporated within an institution's Strategic Plan or whether it should be submitted as a separate strategy document (with appropriate reference in the Strategic Plan being made to the QES).
3. The Committee approved the proposal that, to ensure that the QES is focused, implemented and monitored, the QES should be a separate document rather than its various elements being dissipated within the Strategic Plan.
4. The Committee approved the document setting out the basis for the development of the University's Quality Enhancement Strategy. The Committee noted that this document would form the basis of Appendix 3.13 of the Academic Quality Handbook.
5. The Committee considered the proposed remit and composition of the proposed Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST). It was queried whether it would be appropriate to also include the ASC (or UPC) Conveners in the composition of QUEST and whether the Conveners of Faculty Teaching Committees were appropriate representatives of the Faculties. Following discussion, it was noted that QUEST would be responsible for developing and reviewing QE strategy, but as a Sub-Committee of the UCTL, it would report to the UCTL and as such would have no decision-making powers. The Committee therefore agreed to approve the proposed remit and composition of QUEST.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2002/2006

1. The Committee considered the format, content and planning principles of the current Strategic Plan.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/334)

2. The following comments were made in regard to the current planning principles:-

1. Access, Recruitment and Retention

It was agreed that the phrase "students of the highest calibre" was misleading as the University is not only aiming to attract students with excellent entry qualifications but is also aiming to improve its performance against the benchmarks for participation of under-represented groups.

2. Learning and Teaching

It was agreed that this principle overlaps with Strategic Planning Principle 1 ("...diversity of requirements and needs" and includes material that belongs to Strategic Planning Principle 3 ("...income-generating training programmes for external customers"). It was also noted that this principle fails to address SHEFC condition of grant 2 (continuous improvement of learning and teaching).

1. It was agreed that these amendments would be fed back to inform the development of Strategic Planning Principles for 2002/03.

Action: JGR

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT SEMINAR

463. The Committee noted the notes from the Quality Enhancement Strategy Workshop held jointly with RGU on 11 December 2001.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/335)

WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT RETENTION

1. The Committee noted the communication from the Working Group on Student Retention summarising the main points of their meeting held on 12 December 2001.

(copy filed as UCTL/010202/336)

2. The Committee also noted that it was likely that student retention would be considered on a sector-wide basis within Scotland. A few Scottish Universities (mainly the New Universities) have met informally to discuss and set up a retention and progression forum for HE, in order to share research and good practice. A number of other HEIs, like Aberdeen, have commissioned research into this area.
3. The Convener further informed the Committee that he had attended a joint meeting with RGU to discuss possible collaboration between the two institutions in regard to student retention. At this meeting it had been proposed that a joint seminar should be held with RGU and Aberdeen College at the end of February/early March and that John Little, Chair of the new Scottish HEI Group on Student Retention would be invited to address the seminar.
4. Professor Sloane reported that the Econometric Study would commence in early March, but that it would be some time before any information would be available. However, the procedures for collecting student retention statistics were now in place.

WORKING GROUP ON STUDENTS' PROGRESS ISSUES

1. The Committee noted that the Working Group on Students' Progress Issues held its first meeting on 18 December 2001. At that meeting, it was agreed that, as many of the issues under consideration were intrinsically linked to the proposed revision to the progress regulations being considered by a joint meeting of the UPCs being held on 10 January 2002, no decision could be made on these issues until the outcome of this meeting was known. It was therefore agreed that a further meeting would be held in February 2002.
2. The Committee also noted that the Convener had agreed that the issue of penalties for late submission of course work (minute 400.4 refers) should be referred to this Working Group for consideration.

RESPONSE TO HEFCE/QAA/SCOP/UUK CONSULTATION

PAPER ON PUBLIC INFORMATION SET

(Minute 430.6 refers)

466. The Committee noted that a response to the HEFCE/QAA/SCOP/UUK consultation paper on what information on the quality and standards of learning and teaching should be made available in each HEI and which elements should be published had been drafted by the Convener and the Academic Registrar and forwarded to HEFCE and SHEFC.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

467. The Committee noted that a position paper on the Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities would be put to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee on Disabilities and recommendations would be brought to the March meeting of the UCTL.

SPACE MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING TIMETABLE

468. The Committee noted the report from the Space Management and Teaching Timetable Project Board, which had recently been sent to Senate members for information.

STUDENTS' PROGRESS COMMITTEES

(Minute 450 refers)

469. The Committee noted that, in the light of ongoing discussions regarding issues relating to student progress and in view of the fact that no further responses had been received from the Faculties in regard to this issue, it had been agreed that this matter should be deferred to a future meeting once the outcome of the discussions on student progress issues were known.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

470. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Friday 22 March 2002 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2.