

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2004

Present: Dr JG Roberts (Convener), Professor M Baker, Professor G Burgess, Dr A Clarke, Professor MA Cotter, Ms J Duncan, Mr J Dunphy, Miss A Harper, Dr WF Long, Ms C Macaslan, Mr D McCausland, Mrs D McKenzie Skene, Professor M Player, Professor T Salmon, Professor G Seymour, Mrs L Stephen, Professor DW Urwin, Dr G Walkden and Dr M Young with Dr D Comber, Mr JLA Madden, Mrs J McAndrews, Ms D McDowall, Dr T Webb and Dr G Mackintosh (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Marr and Dr N Spedding

The Convener welcomed those members attending their first meeting.

**MINUTES**

54. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2003, subject to amendment of Minute 36.5 to read: "It was further noted that part-time distance learning students are not included in the class representative training and it was agreed that the Students' Association should work with KEY Learning and the School of Education to address this issue."

*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/476)*

**MATTERS ARISING**

- 55.1 In regard to Minute 32.1, the Committee noted that the Students' Association was working with Student Support Services in regard to the production of leaflets giving students advice on how to appeal or submit a complaint.
- Action: JD**
- 55.2 In regard to Minute 36.4, the Committee noted that the College Teaching and Learning Committees would report back to the next meeting of the UCTL in regard to their discussion concerning the issue of class representation.
- 55.3 In regard to Minute 36.5, it was noted that a report in regard to the provision of class representative training for part-time distance learning students would be brought to the next meeting of the UCTL.
- 55.4 In regard to Minute 37.2, it was noted that Ms Macaslan and Dr Comber had had initial discussion in regard to encouraging membership of the ILT and that a report would be brought to the March meeting of the UCTL. The Convener further reported that the issue of ensuring an uptake of staff development activities had been discussed initially at a meeting of College Teaching & Learning Directors and the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning) on 18 December 2003 and that it would be further discussed at the meeting of QUEST on 17 February 2004.
- 55.5 In regard to Minute 37.3, it was noted that the College Teaching and Learning Committees would report back to the UCTL in regard to their discussions concerning the report from the Educational & Staff Development Unit. These reports would be brought to the March meeting of the UCTL.
- 55.6 In regard to Minute 44.8, the Convener informed members that neither Ms Macaslan nor Mrs McAndrews had been appointed to serve on the Flexible Delivery Planning Group. He believed this was due to the QAA's wish to ensure representation of all Scottish higher education institutions on these committees. He further informed members that Mr Dunphy had been appointed as the student member on the Flexible Delivery Planning Group.
- 55.7 In regard to Minute 47, the Convener informed members that the meeting of Directors of Teaching & Learning had taken place on 18 December. The next meeting was scheduled for 17 February 2004 and at this meeting the group would have an initial look at the Strategic Plan.

- 55.8 In regard to Minute 50, it was noted that there would be a preliminary discussion in regard to the development of guidelines on the relationship between contact hours, level and credit points at the meeting of Directors of Teaching & Learning on 17 February 2004.

### **REVIEW OF GRADE SPECTRUM**

- 56.1 The Committee received a paper on the review of the *Grade Spectrum*.  
(copy filed as UCTL/060204/477)
- 56.2 In introducing the paper, the Convener drew members' attention to the two issues which were being addressed: firstly, ensuring compliance of Honours Degrees with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and secondly, addressing concerns expressed by External Examiners in regard to the fairness of the *Grade Spectrum*. He reminded members that this review had been ongoing for some time and stated that some of the difficulties being experienced with the review were due to trying to use the review of the *Grade Spectrum* to address too many issues. He therefore urged members to consider the issues in isolation.
- 56.3 In regard to ensuring compliance of Honours Degrees with the SCQF, the Convener reminded members that non-Honours and Designated Degrees had already been brought in line with the SCQF. He informed members that the SCQF minimum requirements for a Scottish Bachelor's Degree with Honours is 480 credit points including a minimum of 180 credit points at Level 3 and 4 (SCQF Levels 10 and 11) of which at least 90 must be at Level 4. Currently, the *Grade Spectrum* permits a student to graduate with an Honours Degree having only achieved 420 credit points.
- 56.4 The Convener indicated to members that there are three types of failure: NP (No Paper), CAS of 8 or below and MC/GC (Medical Certificate/Good Cause). He suggested that in regard to achievement of a CAS mark of 7 or 8 at Level 3 or 4 it might be possible to compensate a student by awarding credit at Level 1 or 2 (in a similar manner to the award of compensatory Standard Grades for failure at Higher level in school qualifications). This would ensure that such students could still achieve 480 credit points and would meet the requirements of the SCQF as only 180 credit points are required at Levels 3 and 4. This concept, however, would not work where a student returned a No Paper or was unable to take the assessment due to ill health or other good cause. Such students would require to resit with the resit counting as the first attempt in the case of GC/MC. Students with a shortfall of credits due to ill health or other good cause might alternatively be eligible for the award of an Aegrotat Degree.
- 56.5 There followed a wide-ranging discussion in regard to ensuring compliance with the SCQF, the main points of this discussion being summarised below:-
- Compensation may be difficult to operate in Level 3 courses which are taken by both Honours and non-Honours students. It would be difficult to only compensate where the course was contributing to the award of an Honours Degree.
  - Engineering already operates a system of compensation, for marginal fails in some of its programmes.
  - Students should not be able to enter an Honours programme (both one and two-year) without having achieved all the non-Honours requirements.
  - There was general support to the proposal that students should be required to achieve 480 credit points to be awarded an Honours Degree. The ways by which students could make up a shortfall of credits would require discussion.
  - Following discussion, it was agreed that the minimum credit requirement should be set at 480 credit points in accord with the SCQF. There was, however, no support for the proposed system of compensation.
- 56.6 There followed discussion in regard to how a student with a shortfall of credits could make these up in order to be awarded an Honours Degree. The main points of the discussion are summarised below:-
- The addition of resits at Honours level would be a significant extra workload for Schools.

- Resits for certain aspects of Honours programmes such as Thesis may not be easy to provide. It was, however, noted that this may be anomalous compared to a PhD Thesis as students failing a PhD are afforded one opportunity of re-submission.
- Students failing a course could elect to take a course at Level 1 or 2 rather than resitting. This would still comply with the SCQF so long as the student has achieved 180 credit points at Level 3 and 4, including 90 at Level 4.
- Some students who fail at Honours may elect to exit with a Designated Degree rather than resitting.
- The addition of resits at Honours level may add to the workload of External Examiners; however, the External would only require to confirm the mark of a first attempt (where a student was unable to take the exam at the original diet due to illness or good cause). In all other cases, the resit would only be required for credit accumulation and not classification purposes.
- The timing of resits would need consideration. To avoid significant additional workload for Schools, students failing at Honours might be required to either return the following session to extend their studies and thereby make up their shortfall of credits or to return and resit at the next diet (in January or May/June) as an external candidate. It was noted, however, that in the case of Level 3 courses that this might lead to a difference in the resit options available to Honours and non-Honours students.
- Concern was expressed that introducing resits at Honours may act as a demotivator. It was, however, acknowledged that as only the first attempt would count towards honours, that this should not happen.

56.7 Following this lengthy discussion, it was agreed that the College Teaching and Learning Committees should be invited to discuss the issue of resit provision at Honours level and that a discussion paper should be prepared to set out the issues.

**Action: Clerk**

[**Note added by Clerk:** Following the meeting, it was agreed in consultation with the Directors of Teaching and Learning that this discussion should be undertaken at the Heads of School meeting.]

56.8 In regard to the second issue of addressing the concerns of External Examiners about the fairness of the *Grade Spectrum*, the Committee considered the proposed revisions to the *Grade Spectrum*.

56.9 The Convener highlighted to members that, in order to address the concern of some External Examiners that the *Grade Spectrum* was leading to some borderline students achieving a class of degree higher than that which might be expected, additional hurdles had been added. He, however, expressed concern that these additional hurdles would lead to the introduction of further borderlines and that this approach may not be workable.

56.10 There followed discussion in regard to this proposal, the main points of which are summarised below:-

- The proposed revisions make the *Grade Spectrum* less clear cut.
- Upward discretion is still available to Examiners and so can be used where it is felt that a student should be awarded a higher class of degree.
- The current *Grade Spectrum* works well in most areas of study.
- In those areas where the *Grade Spectrum* is not working effectively, it may be that consideration needs to be given to the elements of assessment that are used.
- Examiners should ensure that marks are appropriately awarded and should avoid giving borderline students the benefit of the doubt and awarding a higher CAS mark.

56.11 Following this discussion, it was agreed that no revision should be made to the *Grade Spectrum*.

## PROVISION OF SPECIAL EXAM CONDITIONS

- 57.1 The Committee received a paper on the provision of special examination conditions.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/478)*
- 57.2 The Committee noted that the proposals were subject to sufficient extra rooms being available within the current constraints of the exam timetable. The Committee noted that there may be difficulty for some Schools in providing additional invigilators to attend at the start of the examination in the extra room(s) whilst also providing cover in the main venue. In approving the proposal, the Committee noted this concern and also noted that the proposal was welcomed by both staff and the Students' Association. It was agreed that the Registry should explore the feasibility of introducing the system for the June 2004 exam diet.

**Action: HD**

## REVIEW OF THE PLANNING CYCLE AND THE REMIT AND COMPOSITION OF THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES (UNDERGRADUATE) AND THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME COMMITTEES

- 58.1 The Committee received a paper on the review of the planning cycle and the remit and composition of the Academic Standards Committees (Undergraduate) and the Undergraduate Programme Committees.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/479)*
- 58.2 The Convener reminded members that following the establishment of Colleges, the UCTL had reviewed the planning cycle and the method for approval of planning cycle proposals. As part of this, Colleges had been charged with the academic scrutiny of such proposals, a job previously undertaken by the Academic Standards Committees and Undergraduate Programme Committees. The review of the remit and composition of the ASCs and UPCs was therefore the next logical step.
- 58.3 There followed a discussion in regard to the proposals as set out in the paper, the main points of which are summarised below:-
- In regard to Recommendation 1, the issue of potential insularity of the Committee was discussed. Concern was expressed that perhaps in some of the smaller areas this may be an issue as the UPC Convener may end of considering proposals which they had brought forward themselves. It was noted, however, that Colleges would also be scrutinising the proposals so that would remove a certain degree of this insularity. Following discussion it was agreed that should the UPC Convener feel that they had a conflict of interest in regard to a proposal that it could be referred to the ASC Convener for consideration.
  - In regard to the proposed Job Description of the UPC Convener as detailed in Annex C, it was noted that in a number of places it stated "on behalf of the Committee". As the Job Description makes reference to a number of Committees it might be appropriate to define the Committee to avoid any issue of lack of clarity.
  - There was discussion as regards the appropriate title for the UPC Convener as they would no longer be convening a committee. It was agreed that the UPC Conveners should be invited to make suggestions to the Academic Registrar.
- 58.4 Following this discussion, the Recommendations as set out in the paper were approved and it was agreed that these should be forwarded to the Senate.

**Action: Clerk**

## PROGRAMME SPECIFICATIONS

- 59.1 The Committee received a paper setting out a proposal that in view of the change to the arrangements for the external assurance of quality and the decision to no longer undertake review at subject level that the purpose of Programme Specifications was less clear and hence should be reviewed.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/480)*

- 59.2 In view of the above, consideration had been given to whether Programme Specifications in their current format were still fit for purpose and the University had asked that the issue be discussed on a sector-wide basis at the forthcoming Teaching Quality Forum of Universities Scotland in order to reach a sector-wide view on the matter. The proposals brought forward would simplify and reduce the burden for production of Programme Specifications. The proposed revised version would be a simple document available on the web with links to more extensive information such as provided through the Catalogue of Courses, University Calendar and Course and Programme Handbooks.
- 59.3 The UCTL in supporting these proposals agreed that the existing documents were not especially student-friendly and that the proposed revisions should also still meet the requirements of Enhancement-Led Institutional Review.

**Action: Clerk**

#### **ELIR TIMETABLE**

- 60.1 The Committee considered the proposed timetable for preparation of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review that will take place in 2004/05.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/481)*
- 60.2 Concern was raised in regard to the level of student involvement in the process of the production of the Reflective Analysis document. The Convener reassured members that the period between April and August had yet to be set out as regards the production schedule for the document but that there was every intention to fully involve students and academics in the production of the document. The proposed Quality Enhancement website may also be used as a mechanism for allowing input from a wider academic community in addition to consultation through committees such as the College Teaching and Learning Committees. It was further noted that while Senate would be asked to consider the document which may be quite lengthy, an Executive Summary would be provided highlighting the key issues and that members would be invited to read the whole document possibly provided on the web.

#### **REVISED COMPOSITION OF QUEST**

- 61.1 Following the establishment of Colleges and the formation of College Teaching and Learning Committees, it was proposed that the composition of the Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST) be revised. The revised QUEST would continue to develop and keep under review an institutional strategy for quality enhancement. The Committee considered the revised composition of the Quality Enhancement Strategy Team as detailed in the attached paper.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/482)*
- 61.2 It was proposed that the Academic Standards Committee Conveners should also be members of QUEST due to their role in Internal Teaching Review and the enhancement aspects of that process. Concern was also expressed in regard to the loss of staff development membership of that committee. However, it was agreed that, where appropriate, other relevant staff (e.g. staff from the Educational and Staff Development Unit and DISS) would be invited to attend meetings. Following these revisions, the revised composition was approved.

#### **EXAMINATION TIMETABLING**

62. The Committee noted that the examination timetable for the first half-session 2003/04 had a significant reduction of Saturday and evening examinations. There were 12 evening examinations (10 of which were for evening classes and evening slots were requested) and there were 7 examinations on Saturdays (5 of which were specifically requested as they were for distance learners).

## **ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW – NOMINATION OF STUDENT REVIEWERS**

63. The Committee noted that the following appointments as student reviewers for ELIR had been made:-

Mr D Cockburn – invited to training in November 2003  
Mr J Dunphy – details kept on file for 2004/05

### **QAA CODES OF PRACTICE**

- 64.1 The Committee noted that a paper setting out compliance with and recommendations in regard to the QAA Code of Practice on Admissions and Recruitment would be considered by the Student Recruitment & Admissions Committee and the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) in February and March and a report would be brought to the meeting of the UCTL on 26 March 2004 for consideration.
- 64.2 The Convener informed members that the second revised QAA Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning had been received. He had invited Mrs McAndrews and Dr Spedding to comment on the revised Code and to confirm our compliance with the Code. In discussion, it was agreed that Ms Macaslan should also be asked to be involved in that process due to the number of distance learning programmes provided by the School of Education.

### **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT ENGAGEMENTS: ONLINE SUPPORT FOR STAFF**

- 65.1 The Committee noted that, in support of the University's Quality Enhancement Strategy, a proposal had been made to construct a web-based resource available to all staff. The website, to be constructed and maintained jointly by the Educational & Staff Development Unit (ESDU) and the Registry, would provide:
- a quick reference guide to quality enhancement, with definitions and information on the primary bodies involved and the funding opportunities that they provide;
  - a facility to allow the University to showcase and disseminate examples of its own good practice across the HE sector;
  - a monthly briefing on quality enhancement;
  - an up-to-date list of QE-related events, both internal and external;
  - a space for Colleges to share information gathered from attending QE events.
- 65.2 While the introduction of the website was considered to be a significant benefit, concern was expressed as regards to how staff would be encouraged to engage with the process of enhancement and to use the website. It was noted that the attendance at the Quality Enhancement Workshops organised by the QAA had been low. It was noted that this may have been due to (i) lack of awareness or (ii) the distance from Aberdeen. While the Convener reassured members that the QAA would not be auditing the University's attendance at these events, he shared concern of members in regard to the difficulties in ensuring dissemination of the issues raised at these events in such a way as to benefit members locally.
- 65.3 It was proposed that one way to ensure more effective dissemination may be to ask members of staff from the Educational & Staff Development Unit to attend these events and to then look at ways to disseminate this information through training events to academic staff at the University. Dr Comber commented that while the Educational & Staff Development Unit staff would be happy to attend these events they were primarily aimed at practitioners and as such it may be more effective for academic staff to attend these events in person.
- 65.4 Members who had attended some of these enhancement events commented that they were primarily attended by staff from newer universities and that the representation from the ancient universities was somewhat limited. Furthermore, the presenters were mainly from newer institutions. Dr Roberts agreed to try to ensure through his involvement in the enhancement themes for 2004/05 that greater inclusivity was borne in mind for these events. He further commented that the decision of the Assessment Steering Group to run these workshops may not have been the best method to engage academic staff with the enhancement theme.

- 65.5 It was proposed that local dissemination would be vital to ensure that benefit was gained from these events. It was noted that the proposed QE website could act as a central repository for all three Colleges to feedback in regard to attendance at these events. It was further noted that some of these events had been non-discipline specific and that it may be more successful were the events to be targeted on a discipline basis. Location was also seen as an issue and it was noted that some events had been large and that it might be possible in future to split these and run some events nearer to Aberdeen.
- 65.6 It was also noted that there would be some publication in regard to the outcomes of the enhancement themes at the end of 2003/04 and that at that point there would be an opportunity to look at the outcome from these events and see whether any aspects of these could be taken forward on a local level.

#### **ILTHE ACCREDITATION**

66. The Committee noted that, following a visit by an ILTHE accreditation panel on 22 January 2004, the University of Aberdeen's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching had been awarded full accreditation. Participants completing this programme successfully would now be awarded Full Membership of the ILTHE. The Committee noted its congratulations both to the Educational & Staff Development Unit and to the School of Education in regard to achieving ILTHE Accreditation.

#### **WORKING GROUP ON ADVISING – INTERIM REPORT**

67. The Committee noted the Interim Report from the Working Group on Advising and Registration prepared following its first meeting on 19 January 2004.

*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/483)*

#### **RACE EQUALITY ACTION PLAN**

- 68.1 The Committee noted the progress report in regard to Teaching and Learning from the Race Equality Action Plan. The Race Equality Policy Working Group at its next meeting would consider this update.

*(copy filed as UCTL/060204/484)*

- 68.2 The Convener informed members that the Working Group on Race Policy had met on 5 February 2004 and had agreed to recommend to the new Joint Equal Opportunities Committee that the Race Equality Policy Working Group become a sub-committee of that Committee. He informed members that currently the membership of that Committee was largely made up of support staff but that the Working Group had recommended that one member from each College should be invited to also become a member of the sub-committee of the Equal Opportunities Committee. Lead bodies from each area would be asked to capture progress in a new Action Plan for 2004/05 and to prioritise tasks within that Action Plan.

#### **POLICY AND GUIDANCE NOTES ON ACADEMIC APPEALS, STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND TERMINATION OF STUDIES OR CANDIDATURE FOR AN AWARD (Minute 39 refers)**

69. The Committee noted that the Senate, at its meeting on 28 January 2004, had approved the Policy documents and Guidance Notes on Academic Appeals, Student Complaints and Termination of Studies or Candidature for an Award. The documents had been forwarded to the University Court for consideration at its meeting on 10 February 2004.

### **DATES OF MEETINGS IN 2003/2004**

70. The Committee noted the following dates of meetings in 2003/04 (all to be held at 2.00 p.m.):-

Friday 26 March 2004

Friday 28 May 2004 (**Note – NOT Thursday 27 May as detailed on the Schedule of Meetings**)

lg/c/uctl/minfeb04