

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2008

Present: Ms CA Macaslan (Convener), Professor AJ Black, Professor G Burgess, Dr B Connolly, Professor MA Cotter, Mr D Hay, Professor WF Long, Dr GTA McEwan, Professor TC Salmon, Dr PVW Schlicke, Professor GM Walkden and Dr MR Young with Dr R Bernard (Clerk), Ms K Christie, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms S Sithamparanathan, Mr DR Paterson and Ms A Hogg in attendance

Apologies: Dr P Edwards, Miss A Harper, Mr DP Lessels, Mrs L Stephen and Ms P Spence

Professor CHW Gane was in attendance for item 168.

MINUTES

167. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2008.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/106)

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE

- 168.1 The Committee received a revised version of the Code of Practice on Student Discipline.
(copy filed as (UCTL/140508/107)
- 168.2 The Committee was joined by Professor Gane, who kindly updated members on the various changes to procedures included in the revised Code. Following on from this briefing, discussion arose within the Committee in regards to the various amendments to the procedures for handling alleged breaches in academic discipline. Members agreed that the proposal to replicate the process for handling allegations of plagiarism, which is operated at undergraduate level 0 – 2, for students registered in postgraduate programme year five was a good one which offered the opportunity to handle such cases in a much more supportive and education way.
- 168.3 The Committee also agreed that it made good sense for the University definition of research misconduct to be included within the Code.
- 168.4 Members further noted that the proposed amendment to permit the Vice-Principal to delegate authority to act as Investigating Officer to a senior member of academic staff (drawn from the Disciplinary Committee Panel) should have the desired effect of making the process better able to deal with the volume of cases.
- 168.5 Following lengthy discussion, the Committee, for its part, approved the proposed changes to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline.

DISCUSSION ITEM: STUDENT ABSENCE

- 169.1 The Committee received an email from Professor David Heald raising his concerns regarding student absence from classes.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/108)
- 169.2 The Committee noted Professor Heald's concern regarding student absence and agreed that this was a serious issue facing the University.

- 169.3 In connection with this issue, members were informed of a forthcoming sector-wide change to immigration procedures and in particular the introduction of Points Based Immigration (PBI). The Committee noted that the University will be expected to provide information to the Home Office on a variety of attendance measures which at present were expected to include: non enrolment of students, discontinuation of studies, students achieving a different qualification from that which they initially applied for. It was agreed that that this would have serious implications for the University, who will be expected to monitor stringently students' attendance. It was noted that such monitoring will have to be for all students not just those coming from overseas.
- 169.4 Further discussion then focussed on student engagement. The view was expressed that students had not desire to attend University if lectures were disengaging; however, there was substantial support for the view that a change in culture was in fact a major contributing factor to student absence and not necessarily student engagement. The Committee agreed that at the present time students are required to work more than in previous years, and although this is not the ideal, many students have to work in order to fund their studies.
- 169.5 The Committee agreed that the University had to recognise that falling student attendance was a major issue. The Committee agreed that feedback from the sector in relation to student attendance would be helpful. Although members were unsure as to whether any research had been carried out in relation to student absence it was agreed that this could help the University understand the reasons for poor attendance and assist the University in moving forward.
- 169.6 It was noted by the Committee that a Project Board was being established in relation to the Points Based Immigration (PBI) and that the University may wish to review and adapt the current monitoring system. It was agreed therefore that the Project Board should report back to UCTL in November.

POSTGRADUATE GRADE SPECTRUM

- 170.1 The Committee received a paper on the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum and Progression: Learning and Teaching Issues.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/109)
- 170.2 Discussion amongst members of the Committee centred around the following main issues:
- Several Committee members questioned why students were required to achieve higher CAS marks in the earlier part of the PG programme i.e. 75% of their credits at CAS mark 12 in order to progress from the PG Diploma stage to Masters compared to a CAS 9 which is ultimately required for the Masters project/dissertation.
 - The Committee expressed concerns about requiring students to perform well (do more than just pass) during the first two semesters of the taught postgraduate degrees, prior to being permitted to progress to the Master's stage. Members agreed that this seemed unfair particularly when considering the high number of international students undertaking postgraduate study at the University: many of these students take time, during the first part of the PG programme, to settle in and become accustomed to the differences in culture, learning environment, writing techniques etc. Members also noted that often these students improve over time and achieve very satisfactory results towards the end of the semester. However despite this, many are still not allowed to progress.

- The Committee also noted that across the University, Schools differed in the approach taken at Examiners' meetings in relation to progression to Master's level. This was acknowledged to be unfair to students as some are able to progress with less than 75% (at the discretion of the Exam Board) whereas others are not allowed to progress and are therefore required to leave the University.
- After lengthy discussions, it was agreed that this was an extremely important issue and one that could not be decided upon during the course of the meeting. It was therefore agreed to discuss this separately and form a Working Group to review the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum and Progression.

Action: Clerk

EMPLOYABILITY REPORT

- 171.1 The Committee received the University of Aberdeen Employability Report.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/110)
- 171.2 The Committee noted the Employability Report from the Careers Service and in particular how the University has used the funding from the Scottish Funding Council. The Committee took particular note of the key target areas for academic year 2007-2008 along with the achievements for this academic year.

DISCLOSURE CHECKING FOR STUDENTS

- 172.1 The Committee received a paper on Disclosure Checking of Students.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/111)
- 172.2 The Committee approved the guidance to be incorporated into Section 6.12, University Policies on Teaching and Learning Arrangements, within the Academic Quality Handbook. One slight concern noted by members was in regard to the response time for Disclosure applications; this can be lengthy at peak times.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

173.1 College of Life Sciences and Medicine

The Committee were updated by Professor Cotter, Director of Teaching and Learning, in regards to the various activities which have taken place recently within the College of Life Sciences and Medicine. These include the introduction of Personal Response Systems (PRS) to all first year students. This was perceived as a successful initiative/pilot and one which the College would like to continue. In relation to this, interactive systems/lectures were developed and have been extremely successful for both staff and students.

The Committee were informed of the introduction of an Induction Co-ordinator, Dr John Baird, for the College. Dr Baird will assist the College with the successful induction of first year students.

Finally the College has been actively involved this year in the Best Practice Fair and felt that this was a successful initiative which should continue in future years.

173.2 **College of Arts and Social Science**

The Committee were updated by Professor Salmon, Director of Teaching and Learning, in regards to the various activities which have taken place over the course of academic year 2007/2008 within the College of Arts and Social Science. These included a review of all first year teaching along with peer observations within the School of Law and the School of Education.

The Committee were informed that SK1003 (Information Skills: Getting Started) had recently been changed from being a compulsory course amongst all CASS students to an elective course. The School of Law had also recently undergone their Internal Teaching Review and recent feedback has indicated that panel members were impressed with the School.

Finally, the College of Arts and Social Science have also been actively involved with the Best Practice Fair and agreed with CLSM that this was a successful initiative and it would be important to continue this in coming years.

173.3 **College of Physical Sciences**

The Committee were updated by Professor Walkden, Director of Teaching and Learning, in regards to the various activities over the course of the academic year 2007/2008 within the College of Physical Sciences. These included several overseas collaborations as well as a big push on staff recruitment.

The Department of Computing Science had recently undergone their Internal Teaching Review which produced positive feedback to both the School and in particular the Department.

Finally, the Committee were informed of the various accreditations across College which had taken place over the course of the year including Chemistry, Computing Science, Planning, Geology.

173.4 **Graduate School – College of Life Sciences and Medicine**

The Committee were updated by Professor Connelly, Director of the Graduate School, in regards to the various activities undertaken by the School including the introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) for PG Taught students as well as PG Research.

The Graduate School had also recently been through their Internal Teaching Review and were looking forward to receiving constructive feedback from this.

173.5 **Graduate School – College of Arts and Social Science**

173.6 **Centre for Learning and Teaching**

The Committee were updated by Dr Young, on the recent activities of the Centre for Learning and Teaching. The Centre had been extremely busy all year round supporting both staff and students in the enhancement of learning and teaching. The key points highlighted included:

- The re-launch of the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching qualification. In relation to this, the Centre is keen to develop a Professional Development Framework.
- Following the extremely positive feedback received by the Centre in relation to the Personal Development Planning pilot, the use of PDP had been developed and rolled out throughout the whole of first year.

- Development and support of the Personal Response System (PRS) within the College of Life Sciences and Medicine.

Throughout the year the Centre had been extremely involved with the various Enhancement Themes, in particular, the Employability theme.

173.7 **Centre for Lifelong Learning**

The Committee were updated by Dr Paterson, Acting Head of CLL, in regards to the various activities undertaken by the Centre over the course of the academic year.

The Committee were informed of the major changes in regards to centralising points of contact. Each College now only has one point of point of contact within the Centre so as to provide a better, more efficient service.

The Committee noted that work with the Registry was ongoing in regards to providing a wider range of 'KL' courses to be made available to 'at risk' students i.e. students who are at risk of having their studies terminated.

Finally the Centre were pleased to report that the Summer School for Access was on track and were hoping to beat the number of students from last year.

FITNESS TO PRACTISE (MEDICINE)

174. The Committee approved the proposed changes to the Guidance Note: Fitness to Practise (Medicine), which put forward the removal of the requirement for cases of breaches in non-academic discipline to be considered and upheld under the Code of Practice on Student Discipline before proceedings may be instigated under Fitness to Practice procedures.

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/112)

REGULATORY CHANGES

1. Centre for Lifelong Learning Certificate and Diploma in Science

- 175.1 The Committee approved, for its part, changes to the Supplementary Regulations for the Centre of Lifelong Learning, as recommended by the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate).

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/113)

2. Professional Graduate Diploma in Education

- 175.2 The Committee approved, for its part, changes to the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) as recommended by the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate).

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/114)

3. BDS regulations

- 175.3 The Committee approved, for its part, Regulations for the Degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) as recommended by the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate).

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/115)

4. MBChB regulations

- 175.4 The Committee approved, for its part, changes to the Regulations for the Degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) as recommended by the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate).

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/116)

TERM DATES FOR STUDENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF DENTAL SURGERY (BDS) 2008-2009

176. The Committee approved term dates for students registered for the Degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS):

Winter term opens	Tuesday 23 September 2008
Winter term closes	Friday 19 December 2008
Spring term opens	Wednesday 7 January 2009
Spring term closes	Friday 3 April 2009
Summer term opens	Monday 13 April 2009
Summer term closes	Friday 17 July 2009

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS

177. On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) and further to discussions at the meeting of UCTL held on 13 March 2008, the Committee approved amendments to the Code of Practice governing research students, to take account of the *Research Ethics Framework*.

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/117)

GUIDANCE NOTE ON STUDENT COMPLAINTS

- 178.1 The Committee approved an amendment to the *Guidance Note on Student Complaints*. Complaints involving two students, i.e. which are student against student, are dealt with under the *Code of Practice on Student Discipline*. The amendment is intended to specify more clearly the types of complaints which will be considered under the *Code of Practice*.
- 178.2 It was agreed to amend the second introductory bullet point as detailed below, additions in bold:

Complaints against another student, **where it can be demonstrated that the alleged misconduct interferes with the proper functioning of the University, its activities, or with the legitimate interests of those who work or study in the University**, will normally be considered under the *Code of Practice on Student Discipline*, a copy of which can be accessed at www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/quality/appendix5x15.pdf or obtained from the Registry, University Office.

SENAS FORM AMENDMENTS

- 179.1 The Committee noted minor amendments to the New Course Proposal SENAS form and associated Guidance Note.

(copy filed as UCTL/140508/118)

- 179.2 The Committee approved the amendments to the New Course Proposal SENAS form with members in agreement that it was important that the University was complying with the legal requirements in relation to equality and Disclosure checking.

CAREERS SERVICE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

- 180.1 The Committee received a paper on proposed changes to Careers Service Partnership Agreements.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/119)
- 180.2 The Committee noted the proposed changes and welcomed the Careers Service plans for academic year 2008/2009.

AMENDMENT TO THE REMIT OF UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING AND THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE (POSTGRADUATE)

181. The Committee noted revisions to the remits of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) and the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate). The revisions, which had been approved by Senate on 30 April 2008, move responsibility for all learning and teaching policy matters at the postgraduate level, to the UCTL.
(copy filed as UCTL/140508/120)

ENHANCEMENT LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR)

182. The Committee noted that the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) was in the final stages of a consultation exercise on the draft second edition of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) Handbook. Reviews carried out from session 2008-09 would be undertaken in line with the methodology defined in the second edition. In line with the timetable used by the QAA in the first round of ELIR, the University of Aberdeen had been scheduled to undergo review during session 2009/10.

REPORT ON SCOTTISH PARTICIPATION IN FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

183. The Committee noted the Report on Scottish Participation in Further and Higher Education, published by the Scottish Funding Council in March 2008. The report is available at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications/scottish_participation_report_01-02_05-06.pdf

STUDENT INDUCTION/RETENTION

184. The Committee noted the outcome of a survey of first year students and a paper on Student Retention, considered by Senate on 30 April 2008. Following further discussions, the paper on Student Retention would be reconsidered by Senate on 11 June 2008.
(copies filed as UCTL/140508/121a & b)

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

185. The next meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 5 November 2008 in Committee Room 2.