

## UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

### Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2009

*Present:* Professor WF Long (Convener), Dr B Connolly, Professor MA Cotter, Ms J Elliott, Mrs L Johnson, Dr GTA McEwan, Professor T Salmon, Professor G Walkden and Dr MR Young with Mr P Fantom, Ms P Spence and Dr R Bernard (Clerk) in attendance

*Apologies:* Professor G Burgess, Dr D Duff, Dr P Edwards, Miss A Harper, Mr D Hay, Professor W Naphy, Dr K Shennan, Ms K Christie, Ms A Hogg, Mr N Edwards and Mr D Paterson

### MINUTES

- 221.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2009.  
(copy filed as UCTL/250309/27)

#### Matters Arising from the minutes

- 221.2 The Committee noted that although there were no formal action points included in the Minutes of the last meeting, two items appearing in the Minutes were identified as requiring action.
- 221.3 The Committee noted that the initial draft revisions to the Academic Quality Handbook, Section 10, *Collaborative agreements, and flexible and distributed learning: quality assurance procedures*, (item 209.1 refers) were sent back for further consideration. A further draft of this item is expected at the next meeting of the Committee on 20 May.
- 221.4 Members noted that the report from the UCTL Working Group on the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum was still awaited (item 220 refers). It was expected that this report would be available at the next meeting of UCTL on 20 May.

### CURRICULUM REFORM

#### Progress Updates

##### *Timeline and frequently asked questions*

- 222.1 The Committee noted that the detailed implementation timetable was approved by the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board on 11 February 2009 and the timetable was already available on the Curriculum Reform website: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/cref/index2.php>.
- 222.2 In addition, the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Curriculum Reform website was also now available. This list of questions has been compiled from queries submitted to the Project Team and the Implementation Board and the list would be added to as and when new questions are submitted to these groups.
- 222.3 Professor Salmon informed members that the College of Arts and Social Sciences was taking a Curriculum Reform road show around its Schools consisting of a talk followed by a question and answer session.

*Undergraduate Personal Development Planning (Recommendations 4 & 33)*

- 223.1 The Committee appreciated that there was no specific subgroup to take forward work on this issue, however the Centre for Learning and Teaching, along with the Careers Service, have met to discuss how these recommendations should be taken forward, along with recommendation 31 of the Curriculum Commission, which is also related to this issue.
- 223.2 The Committee noted that there have been pockets of PDP in each College and it has also now been embedded in a course in CASS. The Centre for Teaching and Learning was looking to roll PDP out to Junior Honours and Taught Postgraduate students next year, and the Centre would be launching another PDP planning event in May of this year. It was further noted that Centre had been successful in securing additional funding from the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Academy, which would be used to employ a consultant to develop and implement PDP from an international angle.
- 223.3 The Committee noted that the Centre was looking more closely at Recommendations 4 and 31, noting that this may be easy for some aspects of the Curriculum Commission's graduate attributes, but not for others, as they are hard to assess. Members discussed, at length, the merits of the postgraduate skills package developed by the University of York, and debated whether the categories from their package could be used as a template and adapted to meet the needs of the University of Aberdeen. It was also noted that there were other skills assessment tools which the University could consider.
- 223.4 The Centre for Learning and Teaching reminded the Committee that it was difficult to engage students with PDP when it is not embedded in their courses and therefore the University should not consider PDP as a separate activity. Members noted that it would be helpful to see the PDP Usage Report linked to specific courses and the Centre agreed that it should be possible to present the Report in this way.
- 223.5 With regard to Recommendation 33, the Committee noted the need to embed opportunities for students to reflect on their skills, and the role that PDP had to play in supporting this. The Centre noted that this recommendation was being taken forward by the Academic Skills subgroup of the Implementation Board, but agreed to continue to provide UCTL with updates on progress with this recommendation.
- 223.6 The Committee invited the Centre for Teaching and Learning to bring forward something which addresses Recommendations 4, 31 and 33 for the Committee to comment on and/or approve at its next meeting in May so that this may be communicated to the Implementation Board.

**Action: Clerk**

*Good Practice identification/dissemination strategy (Recommendation 36)*

- 224.1 The Committee noted that a draft strategy had been produced a couple of years ago, but was now being revisited and adapted by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in light of Recommendation 36 of the final report of the Curriculum Commission.
- 224.2 The Committee was reminded of the work undertaken by the Centre for Learning and Teaching and each of the Colleges, in disseminating best practice, including poster events, College fora, teaching workshops and a best practice fair. In spite of all of the good work carried out in this area, there was concern at the limited number of people involved in these activities, who tend to be same people at the same events year after year. Members noted that the University was good at identifying and disseminating best practice internally, but was perhaps less strong in learning from other institutions and disseminating our good practice to others.

224.3 The Centre informed members that work was currently underway to further develop the draft strategy, highlighting other channels for the dissemination of best practice. The Centre will present its draft strategy to UCTL for comment at its meeting in May.

**Action: Clerk**

#### *Entry qualifications/Entrance Exam (Recommendations 10 & 11)*

225.1 Recommendations 10 and 11, amongst others, were being taken forward by the Academic Administration Sub Group. This Group has met twice and is focussing on the degree framework at this stage, but will be looking at entry qualifications and the entrance exam with a view to reporting back to UCTL on these issues at the meeting in May.

**Action: Clerk**

225.2 Professor Salmon noted that together with the Head of College, he had written to the University Secretary asking for further detail on the impact that increasing entrance qualifications has had on other institutions. Dr Mackintosh agreed to provide Professor Salmon with the information the subgroup had on this.

**Action: Clerk**

225.3 With regard to the degree framework, the Group has considered piloting an advanced entry route which would aim to attract high flying students. It was noted that before being presented to the Implementation Board, any such proposal would need to come through UCTL for wider discussion, and also to allow Heads of School to suggest volunteers for the pilot scheme.

225.4 Members noted concerns that the Implementation Board would approve these recommendations without their prior consideration by the usual academic approval channels of UCTL and Senate. The Convener reminded members of the Implementation Board's view that all such changes should still go through the usual channels of approval.

#### **Statement of Rights (Recommendation 29)**

226.1 Members of the Committee noted similar documents from four other institutions from around the UK, expressing their preference for the York St John model in particular. Student representatives supported this model over the others as it set out equal responsibilities for staff and students alike.

*(copy filed as UCTL/250309/28)*

226.2 There was some discussion of what a Statement of Rights should contain, and it was agreed that it would largely be a clarification of what takes place at present. It was noted, however, that it would be useful to give some indication of the amount of work a student is expected to do, that is; a full-time education should be treated like any other full-time occupation, with an indication of what additional study students should be undertaking out with classes and why. It was further agreed that this would fit well with Curriculum Reform and graduate attributes.

226.3 The Committee noted that Registry would bring forward a draft Statement of Rights to the May meeting, and members were invited to submit their comments to Dr Mackintosh. The Students' Association agreed to provide Dr Mackintosh with a summary of their preferred content for a Statement of Rights.

**Action: Clerk**

#### **Draft Feedback Framework (Recommendation 30)**

227.1 The Committee noted the progress of the Centre for Learning & Teaching in taking forward Recommendation 30 of the final report of the Curriculum Commission. The Convener reminded the Committee of the need for the content of this framework to be approved quickly, as it is due to be implemented in September 2010.

*(copy filed as UCTL/250309/29)*

- 227.2 The Committee were, on the whole, reasonably happy with the content of the draft framework. There was widespread agreement that the last paragraph should not be in bold type and should be incorporated into point three of the 'General' heading of the framework as it applies to all students, not just those failing to achieve a CAS 09 or higher. There was also agreement that familiarity with procedures for providing feedback, currently outlined in the Academic Quality Handbook, needs to be increased amongst all staff.
- 227.3 There was some concern amongst members that Heads of School, who are line managers for those giving feedback, have not yet seen the draft framework, but should since they will have to implement this and need to know what they are signing up for. It was therefore agreed that the language and format of the framework document should be tightened before coming back to UCTL and the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board via Heads of School.
- 227.4 The Committee wished to note its concerns at the workload implications the implementation of the Curriculum Reform Commission's recommendations were having on the Centre for Teaching & Learning and the Registry, who were under significant pressure at this time.

### **REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON JOINT AND COMBINED EXAMINERS' MEETINGS**

- 228.1 The Convener reminded the Committee that the work of this Group focussed on the difficulties faced when External Examiners for Joint degrees were not here at the same time, and the resulting difficulties and disputes which can arise from this. Disputes between examiners can result in academic appeals, and it is difficult for the University to defend itself if there is no audit trail to support the final decision of the exam board, hence the proposal for a Joint and Combined degree exam board.
- (copy filed as UCTL/250309/30)*
- 228.2 Members queried the process proposed by the Group, raising their concerns at the extra work it would involve. Members were then assured that only the few cases where disputes had arisen would be considered by the Joint exam board. This would allow the University to arbitrate in such matters and would ensure that an audit trail existed of the process and decisions reached.
- 228.3 The Committee observed that this seemed to involve a lot of work for all involved with the exam board. The Committee concluded that while the spirit of the recommendations was right, the process may not be. It was therefore agreed that the process proposed by the Group be reviewed and brought back to a future meeting of UCTL for comment and/or approval.

**Action: Clerk**

### **UNDERGRADUATE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING USAGE REPORT**

229. The Committee noted the Undergraduate Personal Development Planning Usage Report. The report was compiled by Dr Perkins in response to discussions at the meeting of UCTL on 5 November 2008.

*(copy filed as UCTL/250309/31)*

### **UPDATE ON POINTS BASED IMMIGRATION SYSTEM**

230. The Committee noted the following update on the move to a Points Based Immigration System:

- We now have a Tier 4 licence (Sponsor Licence Number: 1GF1B20B2)
- The new immigration system will go live on 31 March 2009. From that point on the University will be required to provide a 'visa letter' to international students. The new fields required on the Admissions System will not be live at that point so there will be a work-around until they become available.
- Visas will now be for the duration of the programme of study, and not for 4 years only (still unclear about the position of research students writing-up).
- Visa information is now available on the SRAS website: [www.abdn.ac.uk/sras/international/visa](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sras/international/visa)
- Further information is available on the UKBA website: [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk)
- Universities UK has again asked the UKBA to provide further guidance information to HEIs on the Reporting side
- The Working Group met again on 25 February. It was agreed that, based on the information that is currently available to us on Reporting, we would adopt a system of fixed staged interactions, such as registration, coursework submission, exam results confirmation, combined with other systems, such as the current monitoring system for undergraduate students. This would amount to 5 or 6 fixed interactions, together with 5 other more specific interactions determined by the School/College.

### **EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION (EUA) TRENDS 2010 REPORT**

- 231.1 The Committee noted that the University had been selected to host an institutional site visit in late April for the EUA's Trends 2010 report. EUA's "Trends" report, which have accompanied the Bologna Process from its launch in 1999, have assumed a high profile in contributing to the understanding of developments in European Higher Education.
- 231.2 The site visits provide the qualitative data which, together with quantitative questionnaire data from across the forty-six countries of the Bologna Process, will inform the production of the Trends 2010 report. The site visits are intended to attempt to find out more about the reality of institutional life at a particular point in time in order to help appreciate better the impact that higher education reforms are (or are not) having around Europe.
- 231.3 The University hosted a site visit in 2007 as part of Trends V and has been asked to participate again this year as the EUA are keen to have some continuity in the institutions visited. The Committee noted that the site visit is expected to take place on 27 and 28 April 2009 and Dr Mackintosh would shortly be approaching colleagues to invite them to be involved in the visit.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

232. The Committee noted that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 May 2009 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2