

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2010**

*Present:* Professor WF Long (Convener), Professor G Burgess, Dr B Connolly, Professor MA Cotter, Professor P Edwards, Dr J Geddes, Mr D Hay, Dr MJ Hole, Mrs L Johnson, Professor J King, Mr B Lockhart, Dr GTA McEwan, Professor W Naphy, Mr R Parker, Professor T Salmon, Dr K Shennan, Mr J Simpson, Professor G Walkden and Dr MR Young, with Ms K Christie, Ms A Hogg, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms P Spence and Dr R Bernard (Clerk) in attendance)

*Apologies:* Mr D Paterson

Professor P McGeorge and Ms E Hay were in attendance for item 1.

Professor A Black and Mrs M Viney-Richards were in attendance for item 2.

**MINUTES**

284. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2009, subject to an amendment by the Students' Association to reflect their concern on the effect of the proposed increased entry requirements on the widening participation agenda (minute 256.6 refers).  
(copy filed as UCTL/270110/26)

**INTERIM REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON THE STUDENT  
COURSE EVALUATION FORM (SCEF)**

- 285.1 The Committee received a paper from the Working Group on the Student Course Evaluation Form.  
(copy filed as UCTL/270110/27)

- 285.2 The Committee noted the main findings of the Working Group, so far, regarding the current SCEF system, as follows:
- Paper-based system – not environmentally friendly;
  - Time-consuming process for written comments to be transcribed before dissemination;
  - Closing the 'feedback loop' can be tricky;
  - Difficult to maintain the feeling of anonymity of response, particularly in a small group setting;
  - Feedback from students, particularly free text comment, is not as useful as it might be;
  - Disparity between Academic Quality Handbook recommendation re response rate and the reality experienced across the University.

- 285.3 The Committee noted that under the current process, feedback on a particular course is often not provided to students until 6 months after they have submitted their SCEF form. The Committee agreed that this was unacceptable and further agreed that feedback to students must be disseminated more quickly than currently. The Committee agreed that closing the feedback loop in a timely manner will ensure that students are aware their feedback counts and will hopefully encourage them to participate in the exercise, possibly even resulting in an increase to response rates.

- 285.4 Discussion amongst the Committee centred round the advantages and disadvantages of an online system i.e. online system vs. paper-based system. The Committee noted that the Working Group had been discussing whether issues with the current system could be addressed by simply amending the current form, or by going online. The Committee agreed that choosing a particular format/style was an important part of the review process but agreed that paramount to all of this was ensuring that the University continues to engage with students to ensure responses are received and feedback is given to them.
- 285.5 Further discussion amongst the Committee centred round the response rate of SCEF forms, which at present should be no less than 75%. Members noted the Working Group's indication that 66% of our courses fail to meet the current target and agreed that the SCEF exercise is clearly not achieving its aims in this regard. As a result of this several members questioned whether the Working Group should be looking at the University's current requirement for a 75% response rate.
- 285.6 The Committee noted that the Working Group had found evidence to show that online response rates of 30% were not 'abnormal' for other institutions, with the majority of other institutions acknowledging a reduction in response rates from previous paper-based systems. The Committee further noted that although the response rate for online systems did not appear as good as the paper-based system, the online version did provide better quality feedback.
- 285.7 Members suggested that the Working Group may wish to discuss the possibility of using a dual system (online system and paper-based) to give students the choice of which process they would prefer to complete. The Committee agreed that this could be a good idea to help capture as much feedback from students as possible.
- 285.8 Overall, the Committee were fully supportive of the review and evaluation of the amended SCEF form and look forward to hearing the final recommendations of the Working Group.

#### **INTERIM REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON THE COMMON ASSESSMENT SCALE**

- 286.1 The Committee received a paper from the Working Group on the Common Assessment Scale.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/28)*
- 286.2 The Committee noted that the Working Group had highlighted a number of key issues that they intend to focus their attention on. The Committee noted the first of those issues aimed to help students, parents, employers etc recognise and understand the achievement levels attained, on an international and national level.
- 286.3 The Committee welcomed the proposed scale produced by the Working Group and were fully supportive of it with positive comments received from several members. The Committee were in agreement that it was an improvement on the current system; however one slight concern from members related to this type of system being used in a situation where a student has marks for several pieces of work to be combined. It was agreed that the next phase of the Group's work, possible mechanism for combining marks, would be of paramount importance.
- 286.4 The Committee were supportive of the Group's view that, whatever system for combining marks is adopted this must be implemented universally across the institution to ensure that all Schools and Departments are working consistently.

- 286.5 Some members of the Committee disliked the use of 'Satisfactory' on the proposed scale (D1 – D3) and requested that the Working Group consider amending this to 'Adequate' (D1 – D3). The general consensus amongst the Committee was that 'Satisfactory' gave the impression the student had performed to a satisfactorily level, where in fact a student achieving a 'D3' on the newly proposed scale would have only just passed.
- 286.6 On the whole, the Committee were fully supportive of the proposal and look forward to receiving the next report from the Working Group.

### **IMMIGRATION AND STUDENT MONITORING UPDATE**

- 287.1 The Committee received a paper from Registry outlining the updated Guidance Notes for Monitoring, now taking into account postgraduate students, and the proposal setting out how the University aim to move forward in respect to monitoring of postgraduate students.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/29)*
- 287.2 The Committee noted the introduction of monitoring procedures for both postgraduate taught and research students. The Committee further noted that Registry would be visiting Schools and Departments to talk them through the proposed monitoring system for all postgraduate students.
- 287.3 The Committee noted that the system being implemented was an adaptation of the current undergraduate monitoring system, operating slightly differently at postgraduate level. Following general discussion, the Committee agreed that the monitoring proposal for postgraduate students had to be tried and tested before opinion/feedback could be sought; however the Committee understood that the proposal was as a result of UKBA requirements and that a monitoring system *had* to be put in place.
- 287.4 The Committee noted that the current course of action for dealing with students reported through monitoring only related to undergraduate students. It was agreed that, given the change to the system, this should be updated to reflect both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The Committee further noted that Annex D of the paper was supposed to relate to postgraduate research students; however it was agreed that this did not appropriately reflect the situation regarding research students as it did not refer enough to Supervisors and it should be amended in light of this.

**Action: Dr Mackintosh**

- 287.5 The Committee agreed to approve the Guidance Notes for Monitoring taking into account postgraduate students.

### **REPORT FROM THE UCTL WORKING GROUP ON THE POSTGRADUATE SPECTRUM**

- 288.1 The Committee received an updated report from the UCTL Working Group on the Postgraduate Spectrum.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/30)*
- 288.2 The Committee noted that the Working Group had taken into consideration concerns received from previous meetings of UCTL and Heads of School about maintaining standards, about the extra demands likely to be imposed on staff time by weaker students who have been allowed to progress, and about the increased numbers of failing students.
- 288.3 The Committee noted that UMG strongly endorsed the report; however following general discussion, opinion amongst the Committee regarding the recommendations remained split: once again, some were extremely supportive of the proposal whilst others were not.

- 288.4 Some members were concerned that the proposal would lead to a lowering of standards at the University. However following lengthy discussions, the Committee agreed that any 'issues' in relation to the paper related primarily to the University's admissions criteria. The Committee further agreed that the University should not be admitting students who were unable to work to Master's level (SCQF Level 11).
- 288.5 In relation to the learning outcomes associated with the Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master's programmes, concerns were also raised by some members of the Committee in respect to all three awards being defined as SCQF Level 11. Members from across Colleges were concerned about the possible increase in failing students as a direct result of this. Some members were of the opinion that the standard of the Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma should vary from the Master's Level and that all three awards should not be defined as SCQF Level 11; however it is understood that this is not what the SCQF definition currently states.
- 288.6 The Committee agreed that the paper be put forward to the next meeting of Senate on the proviso that if it were to be approved, the Working Group would be available during the implementation stage to take on board feedback from both Colleges and Schools.

### **POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2010**

- 289.1 The Committee received a paper outlining the proposal for the University to participate in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey in 2010.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/31)*
- 289.2 The Committee noted that this was the first time that the University had chosen to participate in the survey. The Committee further noted that PTES helps institutions enhance the quality of the PGT experience by collecting feedback from current PGT students in a systematic and user-friendly way. The Committee also noted that participation in the survey provides the option for the University to receive its results together with a comparison to one of two 'benchmarking' groups. It is proposed that the University opts to be part of the Russell Group benchmark.
- 289.3 The Committee noted that the inclusion of institution defined additional questions was permitted and that these would be defined prior to the survey being opened to students.
- 289.4 It was noted that the Students' Association were keen to be involved with the survey and to help promote it to students within the University.
- 289.5 The Committee approved the proposals relating to the date of the survey and the choice of benchmark group.

### **ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**

- 290.1 The Committee received an oral update from the Convener regarding ELIR.
- 290.2 The Committee noted that the reflective analysis was still being drafted; however an earlier version of this had been put forward to UMG and Senate in November 2009. The Committee further noted that a third draft of the reflective analysis would be available shortly.

## **UPDATES FROM COLLEGES**

### **1. Actions taken in response to the outcome of the National Student Survey 2009**

#### **College of Life Sciences & Medicine**

- 291.1 The Committee received a paper from the College of Life Science & Medicine in regards to their actions taken in response to the outcome of the National Student Survey.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/32a)*
- 291.2 The Committee noted that, overall, the College was reasonably happy with their ratings in the National Student Survey. However, as in previous years, the College received their poorest ratings in regards to assessment and feedback to students. The Committee noted that each of the Schools within the College were keen to improve their rating in this area and were continually addressing these issues as well as looking at ways of improving the feedback given to students.

#### **College of Arts & Social Sciences**

- 291.3 The Committee received a paper from the College of Arts and Social Sciences in regards to their actions taken in response to the outcome of the National Student Survey.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/32b)*
- 291.4 The Committee noted that all Schools within the College had tabled this as a matter for discussion at their School Executive Committee or School Teaching and Learning Committee and would have more to say on the topic following these meetings.

#### **College of Physical Sciences**

- 291.5 The Committee received an oral update from the College of Physical Sciences Director of Teaching and Learning, in regards to their actions taken in response to the outcome of the National Student Survey.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/32c)*
- 291.6 The Committee noted that the College of Physical Sciences were relatively happy with their ratings in the National Student Survey. The Committee also noted that the College do not believe there are any systematic issues to be addressed from the survey with the exception, as per the other Colleges, of assessment and feedback.
- 291.7 The Committee further noted that a meeting of Heads of Schools within the College would take place shortly and a paper clearly outlining their actions in response to the survey would be submitted in time for UMG.

**Action: College DoTL**

### **2. Use of sparqs Toolkit**

#### **College of Life Sciences & Medicine**

- 291.8 The Committee noted that sparqs toolkits in the College of Life Sciences & Medicine had a poor take up rate; however the College are very happy to continue to work with sparqs and the Students' Association to increase student representation.  
*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/33a)*

## **College of Arts & Social Sciences**

- 291.9 The Committee noted that the sparqs toolkit was discussed at each School Teaching and Learning Committees within the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The Committee further noted that each of the Schools reported academic staff were not, on the whole, very positive about the toolkit, but that some student representatives were supportive of it.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/33b)*

## **College of Physical Sciences**

- 291.10 The Committee noted that the College of Physical Sciences received a similar response to that of CASS with comments received from some staff members indicating that they simply did not have the time to invest in the sparqs toolkit.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/33c)*

- 291.11 Following the discussion at each College level, the Committee noted that Registry still had time available over the next 12 months with a representative from sparqs for further engagement, if need be.

## **ISSUES ARISING FROM A RECENT INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

- 292.1 The Committee received a paper outlining issues arising from a recent Internal Teaching Review (ITR).

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/34)*

- 292.2 The Committee noted the comments received from the Head of School of Social Science on the process of ITR. The Committee acknowledges that the University is duty bound to conduct Internal Teaching Reviews and noted that the ITR procedures were updated recently to take account of revised guidance to institutions on the nature and scope of institution-led Internal Teaching Reviews issued by SFC.

- 292.3 Following lengthy discussions, the Committee agreed that *some* comments in the paper were perhaps worthy of consideration, particularly in respect to the possibility of rationalising the documentation. The Committee agreed that the current volume of documentation required for submission was significant. It was agreed that this should be reviewed to ensure that the University is not requesting information which is no longer required/relevant. It was agreed that this should be taken forward as part of the wider review of ITR to be undertaken for Curriculum Reform.

- 292.4 The Committee also noted the Head of School's comments that he did not feel that the ITR process was a 'light touch' and that it was an increasingly burdensome task/process. Although the Committee sympathised with the School in terms of the volume of documentation, and the time and effort required to prepare the documentation for submission, it was noted that the University's process was at the lighter end of the scale compared to that of other institutions.

- 292.5 The Committee noted the College Director of Teaching and Learning (College of Arts and Social Sciences) requested that both he and the College be disassociated from the letter submitted from the Head of School. The Committee further noted that the College DoTL disagreed with several of the comments put forward by the Head of School, particularly in relation to poor support from Registry and the comment that the review process enforces managerial positions and stifles debate on key matters of principle. Other members of the Committee agreed that Registry were extremely helpful during the process.

- 292.6 The Committee also noted that the second last bullet point of the letter, in relation to having no opportunity to comment, was factually incorrect. The Committee noted that the Convener of the ITR had in fact allowed time for the Head of School to give feedback to the Panel even although this is not normal practice.
- 292.7 The general consensus amongst the Committee was that the whole ITR experience was an enormously helpful process for both Schools and Disciplines with many members finding it an extremely insightful process.

### **REPORT ON THE CLASS REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM**

- 293.1 The Committee received a paper from the Students' Association on the Class Representative System.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/35)*

- 293.2 The Committee noted the challenges faced each year by the Students' Association and in particular problems in recruiting Class Representatives. The Committee agreed that it was a difficult challenge despite encouragement from both Colleges/Schools and the Students' Association. However the Committee agreed that both the Students' Association and the Colleges need to continue to work closely together to ensure the system works as effectively and efficiently as possible.

- 293.3 The Committee noted that the Students' Association were keen to look into a system called Course Rep. Systems Benchmarking Tool. This benchmarking tool is a system for measuring and improving class representatives and was developed by NUS and AMSU based on an Open University report. They believed that this system would be an extremely good addition to the University.

- 293.4 The Committee noted feedback from fellow members on class representatives. Several members of the Committee were highly complimentary of their class representatives and praised them for the time and effort they devote to their role.

### **UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE**

294. The Committee noted that the UCTL Annual Report to Senate would be circulated for comment/information following the meeting.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/36)*

Clerk's Note: Following the meeting the Convener decided to delay consideration of the Annual Report until 17 March 2010.

### **WRITING-UP YEAR FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS**

- 295.1 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the Committee approved a proposal to amend the regulations governing Research students, relating to the writing-up period.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/37)*

## **OMNIBUS RESOLUTION**

296. The Committee approved, for its part, the draft Resolution 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees'. The Resolution enacts the changes in degree regulations recommended by the Academic Standards Committees since March 2009 which have not been the subject of separate resolutions. The Committee delegated authority to the Convener to approve any amendments required subsequent to this meeting, arising from the Curriculum Reform revalidation exercise.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/38)*

## **AMENDMENTS TO THE CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE**

297. The Committee noted and approved the amendments to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (non-academic).

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/39)*

## **AMENDMENT TO STANDARD TERMS GOVERNING OFFERS**

298. The Committee noted and approved the amendments to Standard Terms Governing Offers of Admission for undergraduate and PGDE students.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/40a,b)*

## **CHANGE IN A-LEVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR MEDICINE FOR ENTRY IN 2012 AND BEYOND**

299. The Committee noted and approved the proposal to increase A-Level entry requirements for entry to Medicine from September 2012 and beyond.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/41)*

## **GRADUATION DATES**

300. The Committee approved the dates and allocations of students for the July 2010 Graduation Ceremonies.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/42)*

## **AMENDMENTS TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE SENATE POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC APPEALS COMMITTEE AND SENATE STUDENTS' PROGRESS COMMITTEE**

301. The Committee noted that, at its meeting on 18 November 2009, the Senate had approved amendments to the composition of the Senate Postgraduate Academic Appeals Committee and the Senate Postgraduate Students' Progress Committee as detailed in the attached paper.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/43)*

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

302. The Committee noted that, following discussions at the meeting on 25 March 2009, the recommendations of the Working Group were still under consideration by the Convener of UCTL and, following further consultation with the Working Group, it was anticipated that revised recommendations would be brought to a future meeting.



### **RISK REGISTER**

303. The Committee noted an amended entry in the University's Risk Register approved by the Convener since the last meeting.

*(copy filed as UCTL/270110/44)*

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

304. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held as follows:

Wednesday 17 March 2010 at 2 p.m.