

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE  
(29 October 2010)

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2010**

*Present:* Dr J Morrison, Professor P McGeorge, Professor M Cotter, Professor W Long, Dr R Wells, Dr G Mackintosh, Ms P Spence with Ms Alyson Hogg (Clerk) in attendance.

*Apologies:* Ms Katja Christie, Mr P Fantom and Professor G Walkden.

**REMIT AND COMPOSITION**

- 1.0 The Committee noted the Remit and Composition of the Undergraduate Committee which had been put together in light of the recent changes to the Teaching and Learning committee structure.  
*(copy filed as UGC/291010/001)*
- 1.1 The Committee acknowledged that the Undergraduate Committee would be a sub-Committee of University Committee on Teaching & Learning and had been established with a focus on the wider student experience covering issues including academic and pastoral support, induction, skills development, recruitment and student feedback.
- 1.2 The Head of Student Recruitment & Admissions (SRAS) requested her colleague, Mrs C Baverstock, be copied into any future papers to ensure that appropriate representation is provided when discussing matters relating to admissions.

**Action: Clerk**

**DRAFT LEARNING & TEACHING EXTRACT FROM THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

- 2.0 The Committee were invited to consider the draft extract from the Strategic Plan which referred specifically to Learning and Teaching.  
*(copy filed as UGC/291010/002)*
- 2.1 The Committee noted the six main outcomes of the strategic objective and were asked by the Convener of UCTL to consider each and provide comments as appropriate. Although the Committee had limited ability to make any major changes to the six outcomes, it was agreed that it would be useful for the Committee to discuss these and to provide comments and feedback.
- 2.2 The Committee noted that, as part of the strategic objective, it was the University's aim to enhance the accessibility of our programmes through flexible delivery of provision. Following this, discussion centred round the current part-time General Degree of MA programme, which is being introduced by the College of Arts and Social Sciences working with the Centre for Lifelong Learning. The Committee agreed that this was a prime example of flexible delivery of provision enhancing the accessibility of our courses and queried whether it could be developed for other degrees.
- 2.3 The Head of SRAS informed the Committee that, although the University of Aberdeen is not currently seen as a major provider of part-time learning, there was increasing interest in part-time learning/flexible delivery opportunities.

- 2.4 The Committee agreed that many of the courses currently offered on campus could be delivered flexibly, however to make such a shift it would be important to encourage staff to give active consideration to ways to deliver their provision more flexibly.
- 2.5 In relation to this, the Committee agreed to put forward a request to make an amendment to the SENAS forms currently being used as part of the revalidation process. It was agreed to include a question regarding flexible delivery/blended learning which would encourage people to think about whether or not their course could be taught as part of a flexible delivery programme and if not, why?
- 2.6 The Committee agreed that this was the best way of determining which of our courses would be suitable for part-time study. It would also encourage staff to think about flexible delivery and whether this was an option for their course.

**Action: Clerk/Registry**

- 2.7 Following general discussion, the Committee agreed that the University would not be able to deliver these types of programmes without the necessary resources. The environment surrounding flexible delivery is extremely important and underpins the success of flexible delivery.
- 2.8 In reviewing the strategic objectives, the Committee agreed that it was extremely important that any outcomes were underpinned by the appropriate performance measures. In relation to this, discussion centred round the delivery of excellent teaching (outcome 1.2), in which members agreed there appeared to be very little reference made to it in the performance measures. The Committee agreed that the University needs to continue to promote and enhance the recognition and reward of teaching.
- 2.9 The Committee further agreed that in order to ensure the delivery of excellent teaching, staff need to feel valued and that the only way to do this is for the University to ensure the supporting, developing and rewarding of all staff.

### **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY**

- 3.0 The Committee received an updated version of the paper from Policy, Planning and Governance summarising the results of the National Student Survey (NSS), which the University took part in for the fourth time in 2010.
- (copy filed as UGC/291010/003)*
- 3.1 In addition to the paper summarising the results, the Committee received detailed responses from each of the Colleges and the Students' Association. These comments were in response to information provided to each College detailing breakdowns by subject and discipline, where results for the University have been above the required threshold.
- 3.2 Though it was agreed that a full discussion of the NS survey was impossible in the absence of any Student Association representatives, the responses were reviewed by the Committee. It was evident to the Committee that both the Colleges and the Students' Association were in agreement that action needed to be taken to address some of the issues highlighted as a result of the National Student Survey.
- 3.3 In particular, assessment and feedback was highlighted as a main area of concern from both the Colleges and the Students' Association. Following general discussion, it was agreed that a small meeting, including the Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching), the Directors of Teaching and Learning and the Students' Association should be set up to discuss the issues coming out of the NSS and how best to proceed. Members further agreed that following this initial meeting, a wider focus group should be set up to take forward the outcome of these initial discussions, and to possibly include postgraduate feedback.

**Action: Clerk**

- 3.4 Finally, the Committee noted that the paper would go to UCTL in November, for discussion/information.

### **STUDENT MONITORING**

- 4.0 The Committee were briefed by the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) regarding possible changes to the Student Monitoring System.
- 4.1 The Committee noted that a small working group would be created to discuss the monitoring of students. The group would be given the task to decide whether the University's current system is fit for purpose and whether our current practice is the best way to support and monitor our students.
- 4.2 Members of the Committee requested that a Director of Undergraduate Programmes (DUPs) be included in any discussion regarding possible changes to the Student Monitoring System given their knowledge and experience of the current system.

**Action: Professor McGeorge/Registry**

### **HIGHER EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT RECORD (HEAR)**

- 5.0 The Committee received a paper outlining the progress to date and issues for discussion regarding the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).  
*(copy filed as UGC/291010/004)*
- 5.1 The Committee noted that the Burgess Steering Group were keen for the University to participate in the trial given the close alignment of this work to our Curriculum Reform project. The Committee further noted that work to date has focused on developing an initial draft outline of the University's HEAR and ensuring that provision is in place within the student record to allow the recording of sustained student courses and co-curricular activities such as the STAR award.
- 5.2 The Committee also noted that the University had met with St Andrews University, who were participants in the phase one trial, to discuss their approach to developing the HEAR.
- 5.3 In drafting the HEAR document, the Committee noted that a number of issues had arisen particularly in regards to sections 4.3 and 6.1.
- 5.4 Section 4.3 deals with the programme details including course studies and individual marks obtained. In relation to this, the Committee noted that some institutions, including the University of Aberdeen, do not currently include details of resits or fails and simply record the final mark and the credits achieved. However the Committee further noted that the Burgess Group were of the view that a complete record (including fails) should be provided.
- 5.5 Following general discussion, the Committee agreed that they did not feel the University should move away from the current 'record of achievement' approach and include fail marks on transcripts. Although the Committee did not feel that the HEAR should include fail marks, they did agree that it should show the student's pattern of attendance and should, at least, show the number of attempts on the transcript.
- 5.6 The Committee acknowledged that section 6.1 is the major area which makes the HEAR distinct from the transcript. This is the area which is intended to allow institutions to add additional information of the student's achievement both academic and non academic.
- 5.7 In terms of determining the activities which should be recorded on the HEAR and which should not, the Committee noted that St Andrews University had decided to include only

activities on which the University had made some qualitative judgement in regard to the student's participation.

- 5.8 Wide-ranging discussion followed with some members querying whether employers could be given a link to an ePortfolio site which, although not endorsed by the University, would show employers what activities the student has undertaken and any academic or non academic achievements to date. However other members were against this idea and felt that any information being included on University documentation should be solely that validated by the University. It was felt that without endorsement from the University it would devalue the information contained within it.
- 5.9 The Committee, however, agreed that activities/achievements such as the STAR awards should be recorded within section 6.1 of the HEAR.

### **CAREERS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

- 6.0 The Committee received a paper outlining the Annual Report for the Careers Service for academic year 2009-2010.

*(copy filed as UGC/291010/005)*

- 6.1 The Committee noted that as a result of Curriculum Reform the remit of the Careers Service has broadened and expanded their provision, services and opportunities for students to include a co-curricular area in the Hub.
- 6.2 The Committee further noted that in addition to preparing all students for a successful transition to employment or further study, the Careers Service had significantly extended their provision to include work placement opportunities, study abroad provision including ERASMUS and the International Exchange Programme and the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Awards.
- 6.3 Having reviewed the paper, the Head of SRAS requested further information on the destination statistics of our graduates. The Committee noted that SRAS were often asked about destination statistics from prospective students and it was agreed that it would be helpful for them to have access to this information.

**Action: Careers Service**

- 6.4 Finally, the Committee noted that although destination statistics could be obtained for UK postgraduate students, it was much more difficult to obtain statistics for international students. The Committee felt that this was unfortunate given international students make up a high proportion of our postgraduate student numbers. As the survey is conducted via telephone calls, it is much harder for this information to be obtained from international students. In relation to this, the Committee made a suggestion that an electronic survey be carried out on these students, particularly now that all students have email for life.

### **CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING ANNUAL REPORT**

- 7.0 The Committee received a paper outlining the Annual Report for the Centre for Learning and Teaching for academic year 2009-2010.

*(copy filed as UGC/291010/006)*

- 7.1 The Committee noted that the Centre for Learning and Teaching continues to provide a wide range of support and development opportunities for both staff and students which include one-to-one advice, professional development, consultancy services and project work. In addition to this, the Centre for Learning and Teaching continue to support and deliver numerous of activities across the University of Aberdeen, including workshops and events.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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

Friday 10 December 2010 at 2.00pm in the Court Room, University Office