

UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE  
(13 May 2011)

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**UNDERGRADUATE COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2011**

*Present:* Dr J Morrison, Ms J Bjorkqvist, Professor M Cotter, Ms J Donald, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr D McCausland, Ms M McHaney, Professor W Long, Dr J Perkins, Ms J Paton, Professor G Walkden, Dr R Wells, Ms P Spence with Ms Alyson Hogg (Clerk) in attendance.

*Apologies:* Ms K Christie, Dr G Mackintosh and Professor P McGeorge

*Clerk's Note:* The Committee welcomed the new Students' Association President for Education and Employability, Ms Josephine Bjorkqvist.

**MINUTES**

23. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2010.

*(copy filed as UGC/130511/017)*

**MATTERS ARISING**

24.1 Item 16.6 of the previous minute refers. The Convener informed the Committee that a meeting had now taken place between him and Ms Janine Chalmers, the University's Equal Opportunities Adviser. In relation to this, the Convener was pleased to report that there were no issues with the proposal to trial identifying 'at risk' students before they arrive at University.

24.2 Item 16.7 of the previous minute refers. The Convener informed the Committee that the practicalities of how this process would be administered had now been discussed in more detail with staff from both Registry and Admissions.

**FACILITATING THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING QUALITY**

25.1 The Committee received a paper on facilitating the enhancement of teaching quality. The Committee noted that the proposal was intended to provide a framework to enable teaching staff to get formative feedback on their individual teaching quality.

*(copy filed as UGC/130511/018)*

25.2 In discussing the paper, the Committee noted the various methods which might be used at an individual level to help staff enhance the quality of their teaching. The Committee also noted that these methods tend to draw on data from a number of different sources and involve a significant element of self-reflection.

25.3 Opinion was divided amongst the Committee about the proposed model for measuring teaching quality. Some members questioned how much research had been conducted on the proposed model; others questioned how labour intensive the reviews of this model would be? In relation to this, concerns were raised about the training required to properly analyse the findings, without which the reviews would have significantly less benefit. However, the Committee were informed that appropriate training would be provided to both the individual and line-manager on how to analyse and interpret the results. Following discussion, the Committee were reminded that the proposed model was only a small part of the whole process of enhancing the quality of teaching.

- 25.4 In terms of moving forward, the Committee agreed that in order for staff to engage with this model, it must be seen to move towards an improvement in teaching quality. In addition, the Committee agreed that the University has an obligation to ensure staff understand that teaching excellence is a valued part of the appraisal and promotions exercise and is equal in importance to other areas of University work.
- 25.5 Following lengthy discussion, the Committee were keen, in principal, to endorse the proposal, however were unsure of its possible success rate given that, at present, it is not a requirement for all teaching staff to hold the relevant teaching qualification (PG Certificate: Teaching in Higher Education). In relation to this, the Committee requested that the proposal be attached to teaching quality as part of the PG Certificate: Teaching in Higher Education.

**Action: Clerk**

### ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT

- 26.1 The Committee received a paper outlining proposals for changes to the University's student support system, and in particular the University-wide advising system, which is a central component of the current student support process.  
*(copy filed as UGC/130511/019)*
- 26.2 The Committee noted the paper set out two stands of support (i) a system of peer mentoring provided by students and (ii) a new personal tutoring system provided by academic staff.
- 26.3 The Committee noted that it was the intention to introduce the new system with effect from September 2012, with the new peer mentoring system being piloted in the School of Medical Sciences during session 2011/2012.
- 26.4 In discussing the proposal, members questioned whether the peer mentoring system would go ahead on its own, if the personal tutoring system was not approved. The Committee noted that the peer mentoring system *would* operate regardless to the outcome of the proposed changes to the advising system (particularly for students studying MA degree programmes).
- 26.5 Following lengthy discussion, members of the Committee agreed that the new personal tutoring system would help complement the peer mentoring system and provide an overall enhanced model of student support. The Committee also agreed that it would help develop a stronger link between tutor and tutee across all years of study, compared to that of the current advising system.
- 26.6 It was evident that the majority of the Committee were supportive of the proposal; however some members of the Committee were not as supportive, with a significant minority of the opinion that the time-line of the proposal was simply not practical.
- 26.7 Some members felt that the proposal undermined the JNCC agreement, which had been put in place as a result of the recommendations made by the Senate Working Group on Academic and Pastoral Support, and in particular the recommendation to implement over a 3 year period from 2010/2011. In relation to this, these members requested that the new proposal be brought in gradually i.e. sequence it over three or four years instead of implementing an almost immediate change. In addition to this, concerns were raised regarding the possible practical difficulties of having so many personal tutors. Members, who were not supportive of the proposed changes, feared that the current pool of Advisers would end up carrying the burden with no monetary benefits.
- 26.8 In regards to ensuring the appointment of an increased number of Advisers of Studies for the coming academic year to help reduce advising loads across the University, the Committee were extremely supportive. In addition to this, the Committee were supportive of the requirement for Advisers of Studies to be appointed no later than the end of May 2011 to

ensure that students are assigned to an Adviser in a timely manner as well as ensuring that new Advisers are trained effectively.

### **VARIOUS ISSUES RELATING TO RESIT EXAMS**

- 27.1 The Committee received a brief paper for discussion, relating to various issues regarding resit exams within the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy.  
*(copy filed as UGC/130511/020)*
- 27.2 Following a brief discussion, the Committee agreed that the issues contained in the paper would be best discussed by the School Teaching and Learning Committee and/or possibly the College Teaching and Learning Committee in the first instance. If required, any issues coming out of discussions could be put to the UG Committee for further discussion.

**Action: Clerk**

### **UPDATE ON INDUCTION AND RETENTION**

- 28.1 The Convener updated the Committee on developments relating to the induction and retention of new Level 1 students, and in particular students from the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS).
- 28.2 The Committee noted that, due to poor student attendance, CASS were no longer intending to provide a specific MA Welcome and instead would provide an induction via Schools/Disciplines. For those students who identify to a School e.g. Education and Law, it was agreed that the School welcome/induction would continue as before. All other students would attend Discipline specific inductions.
- 28.3 The Convener informed the Committee that these inductions would be covered in all Level 1 courses and that although they would all include specific key power-point slides they would differ as each would include specific course information. The Committee further noted that these slides would also be available to anyone outwith CASS who would like to use them.
- 28.4 Following discussion, senior members of the Committee from the Colleges of Life Sciences and Medicine and College of Physical Sciences agreed to put this proposal to their College Teaching and Learning Committee for discussion in the first instance.

### **TIMETABLING UPDATE**

- 29.1 The Convener updated the Committee on the various issues relating to timetabling information for new students this coming academic year.
- 29.2 The Committee noted that *MyCourses* would not be rolled out across the University, as previously requested. The Committee further noted that DIT were concerned that it would not be sustainable, given that it was initially a smaller application built specifically for the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS). The Committee were disappointed to hear that *MyCourses* would not be able to be rolled out across the University and asked that DIT were informed of their frustration.
- Action: Clerk**
- 29.3 The Committee were also informed that *CanDo* would be moved to the web as part of a project to bring it up-to-date, with both Advisers and students being able to access it. The Committee agreed that student access would be a hopefully enable students to view their timetable and allow them to publish it to Outlook, a mobile device or printed timetable.

- 29.4 The Committee noted that a previous request from the Sub-Committee on Induction and Retention to turn off the Student Portal for the first few days for incoming students would not now be possible.
- 29.5 The Committee also noted that the decision had been made to provide hard copy timetables to all new incoming students. The Committee further noted that Schools would be asked to prepare a generic timetable for their area and would need to ensure that these timetables were available at the various Advising venues in September. The Committee also noted that the software required to produce this timetable would be passed to the School Admin Officers and that training would be provided by the Business School as necessary. In terms of information on practical/tutorial sign up, it had been agreed that on the back of each printed timetable tutorial sign up and induction meeting instructions specific to each School would be detailed.

### **CHANGE TO ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**

- 30.1 The Committee noted a paper outlining the proposal from Student Recruitment and Admissions (SRAS) to change the entry requirements with regard to the Degree of Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree.
- 30.2 The Committee noted that currently the BEd degree only requires 3 Highers and the School of Education along with SRAS were keen to increase the minimum entrance requirements to match those of the Degree of Master of Arts (MA) – BBBB in one sitting of Highers, to include English. The Committee further noted that other qualifications will be amended to reflect the change, such as A Level requirements and the International Baccalaureate.

*(copy filed as UGC/130511/021)*

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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

Friday 14 October 2011 at 2.00pm in the Court Room, University Office