

Curriculum Reform

The Final Report of the Curriculum Commission



SUMMARY

Foreword by the Principal

As a community of intellectuals involved in university teaching, it is our duty to reflect regularly on what we teach and to ensure that it remains relevant and challenging. This is a fundamental part of our activities and is as much a privilege as a duty. It provides opportunities as well as challenges.

I am proud that we have spent the last year on this activity and I consider the results to be among the most important products of my period as Principal. I have been delighted to follow the process, to read about the ideas and proposals it has produced, and to follow the debates it has generated.

Our ambition is to be a top hundred international university - curriculum reform is an extremely important part of our strategy to achieve this. We need to lead internationally on curriculum developments as much as we need to attract the best researchers and to provide new and improved buildings and facilities for research, for teaching and for recreation.

The guiding principles behind the proposals and, more recently, the specific proposals themselves, have been tested on employers' organisations, Scottish Government civil servants, schools, students, applicants, parents and guidance teachers. All seem to have received our ideas with enthusiasm. The proposals resonate well with what is happening in the world's best universities and in Scottish schools. We

have a major opportunity to set the agenda within Scotland and the UK, and to be in the vanguard of international developments. We will set standards in curriculum content and in structures for delivery that will become the international standard.

I would like to thank all those involved in an exhausting, inclusive, and exhaustive process. The project team has devoted a huge amount of time and effort to their assiduous research, and to comprehensive collections of views and ideas. But its efforts could not have been as fruitful and successful without the inputs, ideas and presentations of many staff. I am proud to lead a university that is prepared to devote such time and effort to fundamental academic issues, and to take teaching so seriously.

I must thank also everyone from outwith the University who contributed so enthusiastically to our wide-ranging consultation. They include academic colleagues at the Universities of Melbourne, Hong Kong, Harvard and Yale, employers and professional bodies, teachers, prospective students and parents, politicians and many others. Their interest and input has proved invaluable in bringing us to the point of launching proposals for curriculum reform that I consider to be one of the most important developments in the University's recent history.

Professor C. Duncan Rice
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

Regular reviews of the curriculum are an important part of the responsibilities of any group of scholars. They provide an opportunity to celebrate the strengths of what we do but also to reflect and to consider what changes are desirable and necessary in our pursuit of excellence in teaching.

The primary objectives of Curriculum Reform are:

- to make our approach distinctive within the UK and aligned with developments in some of the world's leading universities;
- to enhance the Aberdeen learning experience;
- to enhance disciplinary study; and
- to produce better informed, more rounded and more intellectually flexible graduates.

Our proposals are designed to achieve these. In doing so, we will make our programmes:

- more attractive to students;
- more relevant to employers; and
- more relevant to wider societal needs.

B. BACKGROUND

The evidence base used to inform our proposals was:

- A desk study of the strategic context for curriculum reform;
- External consultations with a wide range of interest groups;
- Internal consultations and feedback on the reports;
- International experiences of curriculum reform;

- Market research on the views of prospective students, their parents and employers;
- Two surveys of our students' views, undertaken last session and this session, by the Students' Association;
- A survey of school guidance teachers;
- Discussions with the Business Committee of the General Council; and
- Reports from three sub-groups of the Commission.

C. GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

We propose a set of Graduate Attributes. These are designed so that a University of Aberdeen education will *enable* graduates to become:

- Academically excellent;
- Critical thinkers and effective communicators;
- Open to learning and personal development; and
- Active citizens.

D. THE FRAMEWORK FOR PROVISION

We propose that there should be a five year framework which incorporates the following:

- A traditional four year Scottish honours degree;
- An advanced entry, three year honours degree for applicants with appropriate subjects and grades in Advanced Highers, A-levels or a possible new University advanced entry examination;
- A three year degree, which would be an enhancement of the old ordinary degree;
- A one year taught postgraduate masters level programme, which develops core discipline material;

- A five year integrated undergraduate programme where required for professional accreditation, such as the MEng and MChem;
- Two further exit qualifications – a certificate after one year and a diploma after two years – in recognition of successful study; and
- Flexible entry (depending on prior qualifications) to and exit from any year of the five, in order to accommodate breaks in study.

E. CURRICULUM CONTENT

We propose that students should normally undertake a programme of **Enhanced Study** as part of their degree programme. To accommodate this, there would be a move to four 15 credit courses each semester.

Enhanced Study would comprise four 15-credit courses (60 credits out of 240) across levels one and two, and two 15-credit courses (30 credits out of 240) across levels three and four.

Students would select the courses from three types:

- **Sixth Century Courses** (6CCs), designed to consider and contrast different approaches to knowledge and different methods of enquiry and, normally, examining real world problems;
- A small number of **Sustained Study Programmes** (SSPs) (such as a language or business), comprising normally four separate courses; and
- A selection of **Disciplinary Breadth Courses** (DBC), proposed from the University Catalogue of Courses by each Degree Programme Team to ensure that the objectives of Enhanced Study are fulfilled.

F. SUPPORTING THE CURRICULUM

We propose that there should be enhancement of existing provision or new provision in the following areas:

- Scholarships;
- Engagement with schools and colleges;
- Induction;
- A Statement of Rights and Responsibilities,
- Assessment strategy;
- Student support;
- Learning and teaching facilities;
- Student skills assessment, and writing and numeracy skills;
- Information Technology (IT);
- Extending best practices;
- The timetable;
- The co-curriculum;
- University-wide lectures;
- Engagement with employers; and
- A graduate transcript.

G. IMPLEMENTATION

We propose an Implementation Board, consistent with the University's template for project boards, to take a strategic overview of the management of the different parts of the proposals.

The proposals could not be effectively implemented unless they were properly resourced.

Changes to administrative structures and capital investments would be phased in from **September 2009**. Changes to curriculum content and associated regulations would be phased in from **September 2010**. Full implementation would last for **six years**.



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