

Principal's Update 06 September 2011

Colleagues

I thought it might be helpful if I were to provide short, regular updates to staff highlighting any recent news, events or issues that I see as being of particular importance. I am conscious that we are all extremely busy with many demands on our time, so I will be brief. The intention is to do this every two or three weeks or so.

Open Day

I had the pleasure of participating in some of the events held as part of our undergraduate open day on 30 August which was our most successful yet with attendance figures well up on the previous year. I'm grateful to everyone who was involved in making the day a success.

The Open Day was timely because it came soon after the University Court had approved the University's position on fees for Rest of UK students and it was a great opportunity to promote directly to potential applicants the approach that we have adopted. Generally, the feedback seems to have been positive and as our competitors in Scotland now begin to announce their positions over the coming weeks, we will be working hard to market the attractiveness of our position.

I should also thank all colleagues who contributed to the very good debate we had at Senate on the issue a few weeks ago which helped to inform an excellent discussion at Court.

National Student Survey

Importantly in this context, the results of the UK wide 2011 National Student Survey (<http://www.unistats.com/>) were announced recently and I am pleased to report that the outcome for Aberdeen was, in many areas, very positive. As many of you will know, the survey is used extensively by prospective applicants and so it is important to have performed well.

The 2011 results report that 88% of our final year students were satisfied with the quality of their education at Aberdeen. That puts Aberdeen ahead both of the UK and Scotland averages and of our benchmark. It was even more encouraging that in the following subject areas: Microbiology, Film Studies, Medicine, History, Sociology, English Studies, Anthropology, Biology, Law and Physical Geography, 95% of students or more agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of their course. This is great news and congratulations are due to all concerned. I know that everyone will want to maintain or even enhance these satisfaction levels and will ensure our shared goal of a student experience second to none. I had the pleasure of thanking some of our key staff in this area when I hosted a reception for the winners of the annual Excellence in Teaching Awards.

There are areas, of course, where we need to look at how we can do even better, particularly in relation to feedback. Peter McGeorge, Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning will be discussing what lessons we can learn from these results with Schools particularly in terms of sharing good practice and I know everyone will want to work with him in this regard. Overall though we can all take a great deal of satisfaction from our performance and we should be confident that, with appropriate action, we can do even better next year.

QS World University Rankings

The 2011 version of these world university rankings have also recently been issued and while our position has slipped this year, importantly Aberdeen remains a Top 150 university. I don't believe in being too focused on rankings and there are many, many other criteria by which an internationally competitive university can be measured. With that said, we know that applicants take rankings into account and we will, as always, be analysing the results to identify where we can work to improve our position.

Finally, just a brief mention of a few other events that have taken place recently which have underlined to me the high quality of our staff. First, I had the pleasure of visiting the Lighthouse Field Station at Cromarty which is the University's Highland base for research on the ecology of seals, dolphins and other marine wildlife. The Station's Director, Professor Paul Thompson, provided me with a fascinating overview of the work that is being undertaken which is a real asset to our University.

Secondly, I have in recent weeks had the pleasure of opening two major international conferences – one organised by the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES) on strategies around conflict in conservation management and another by the Rural Law Research Group on legal issues in sustainability for rural communities. Both of these events underline the diverse academic strength we have in the area of sustainability which is one of our four interdisciplinary themes in the new Strategic Plan.

Best regards

Ian Diamond
Principal and Vice-Chancellor