

Principal's Update May 2012

Colleagues

As you will recall I wrote to the community in late March to announce the news of the 100 academic posts that we were about to advertise. Since that announcement the response to the recruitment campaign has been very encouraging and suggests that we should be able to make some exciting new appointments. I would, however, be grateful if colleagues can continue to think of possible candidates that could fit with our ambitions and share these with their Heads of Schools. There is more information at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/thefuture>.

Scottish Funding Council

We are busy at the moment in discussions with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). At the end of March we received our Funding Letter. Largely as we expected it gave us a 6.9% increase in our SFC funding for 2012/13. While very welcome it is worth noting that our SFC funding does not, of course, include the funding that we will receive from fees from students who are non-Scottish UK students. These fees will add to our percentage increase. It was always made clear by the Scottish Government that the increase in funding for Higher Education came with expectations and so we are now about to negotiate 'Outcome Agreements' with the SFC. As this is the first time we have had to do this we are working hard to ensure that both sides understand their obligations and that Outcome Agreements across the sector are broadly comparable.

We also had, on April 4, the privilege of our Strategic Dialogue Meeting with the SFC. These meetings, with a group of SFC Board members, happen every few years and give us an opportunity to discuss current issues and to showcase some of our activities. Among the subjects we discussed were the recent papers on post 16 learning; governance; partnerships; and environmental sustainability and food security. It was a very positive experience, made so by the great work and commitment being undertaken across the University.

Student Successes

Congratulations are due to the successful candidates in the student elections. It was an excellent election, contested in the finest spirit and I know we are all looking forward to working with the new team. Tessa and her colleagues have set high standards but I know the new team under Anne- Claire Deseilligny will, equally, do a tremendous job. Since my last update there have been a number of successes amongst our student community which I think are worthy of mention. The Students' Association are to be congratulated on their success in the NUS Scotland Awards where the Association won the Equality and Diversity award and *Ab Fab* won student society of the year. The Student Show was its usual high standard showcasing some of the enormous talent we have here on campus. Likewise, in the sporting arena, I was delighted to see the men's basketball team progressing to the final of the BUCS Trophy and the men's volleyball team reaching the semi-finals. Sadly, I must also report some less positive news - we lost the Boat Race to RGU!

Rector's Installation

Continuing on the student theme, the ceremony to install Maitland Mackie as our new Rector was held at the end of March and it was a suitably joyous occasion in which our new Rector reminded us of the charismatic individual that he is. I know he will serve the student community well and I look forward to continuing to work both with him, and his assessor, Graham Hunter, on the University Court in our shared aim to improve the student experience at Aberdeen.

The Campus

Steve Logan has been doing a tremendous job leading the development of our estate. I'm sure many of you will have seen the fascinating pictures we issued recently of progress with the aquatics centre which show how quickly the project is progressing. It is an exciting project and great to see it beginning to take shape. It is also, of course, an important example of how we are continuing to invest

in our facilities to make the student experience at Aberdeen a world class one. A few weeks ago, we were able to show our local MSPs some pictures of how the new Rowett Building will look as it starts to go up in the near future. Not only is the design exciting but bringing colleagues from the Rowett to Foresterhill will, I know, serve further to enhance our science.

Craig Group

As the media debates the budget announcements on philanthropic giving, the importance of the generosity of our donors was demonstrated recently when we celebrated a donation from the Craig Group to the Library. The event, to name the David Craig Suite on the top floor also featured the unveiling of a magnificent statue of David Craig the co-founder of the Craig Group who have been marvellous supporters of the University over the years. A great many other supporters and donors were present and it was an encouraging reminder of the healthy levels of support we have amongst the wider community and which can make a major contribution to creating exciting projects such as the Library.

Development Funding

Continuing on the development theme we held two further recent events to recognise the contribution donors have made to the University in recent times. First was a scholarships event in Aberdeen that gave students who have benefited from a scholarship an opportunity to meet with their donors. The University currently administers 316 scholarships totalling £3.2million and this figure has increased by 19% in the last year. Second as an event in the House of Lords, where we held a celebration of our Sixth Century Campaign with a reception for our donors. A magnificent occasion, it served also to keep our supporters apprised of developments here on campus and to engage them with future plans. At the same time the Development Team are putting the final touches to a new strategy linked both to the estate developments and to raising funds for bursaries and scholarships. This strategy and its associated operational plans will be released following approval by the Development Trust.

Research Grant Successes

Many of you will have read of the success of the Aberdeen Fungal Group in being awarded £5.1M from the Wellcome Trust to lead a major UK collaboration on invasive fungal deaths – something which causes some 1.5 million deaths worldwide every year. This is obviously hugely important work and in the Fungal Group we are fortunate to have the biggest fungal research group in Britain and one of the largest in the world and it is great to see Aberdeen leading a research group consisting of some of the UK's top universities.

It was also exciting to see Dr Alan Bowman in the Institute of Biological and Environmental Science receiving £250k award from the BBSRC and the private sector to undertake further research to help tackle one of the biggest killers of honey bees, the decline of which could have major wider implications for the planet.

I was also delighted to see the University succeed in winning a £300k 'Catalysts' award from the RCUK to support public engagement with research activities. Aberdeen was the only university in Scotland to receive such an award which is testament to the excellent work that we have undertaken in this area in recent years.

Visit by HRH The Duchess of Rothesay

I'm sure many colleagues, particularly anyone who was in the MacRobert Cafe that morning, will have noted that we had the honour of welcoming The Duchess of Rothesay back to the University to visit the School of Education. I know Her Royal Highness was greatly impressed not only by the work that staff within the School are engaged in but also by the many students that she had an opportunity to meet during the visit.

Recognition for Colleagues

Finally, I was delighted to see the academic achievements of three of our senior academic colleagues being recognised in recent weeks. I'm sure all colleagues will wish to join me in congratulating Celso Grebogi on his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; Crispin Wright on being elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Sciences and Alex Kemp on his receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award at the recent Offshore Achievement Awards. It is a reminder of the kind of national and international profile that we want to help all colleagues realise in the course of their academic careers.

On the theme of recognition for colleagues, we have in recent months taken forward some new initiatives to help recognise the contribution that staff across the University make. We are always keen to receive ideas for new ways of doing this and if colleagues have any suggestions I would be glad to receive these.

Best Regards

Ian Diamond

Principal and Vice-Chancellor