

Principal's Update November 2012

Colleagues

This has been a very busy term and let me start by thanking everyone for the hard work they have put into making what I feel has been an intellectually lively and invigorating campus.

Open Meetings with Staff

Earlier in October I held open meetings for staff at Old Aberdeen and at Foresterhill which provided what I hope was a helpful opportunity to discuss a range of issues and developments within the University and higher education more widely. I certainly took home a lot of helpful comments.

Myra Pearson

I'm sure many colleagues will have been deeply saddened by the death of Myra Pearson OBE, former Head of the School of Education. Myra was a great individual who was hugely respected across the education community in Scotland. Under her leadership the School's model of teacher education provision became the benchmark for others in Scotland. She will be sadly missed.

China

China has been one focus of my activities during the last month. At the end of October I had the pleasure of visiting a number of institutions in China to help promote the University and foster new teaching and research links with leading universities there. The visit began at Hong Kong University (HKU) which is celebrating its centenary this year and with which we have a historic relationship - Aberdeen graduate Sir Patrick Manson having played a key role in the foundation of HKU's forerunner the Hong Kong College of Medicine. We also, however, have very strong contemporary links with HKU, which is widely regarded as a world leading university. It was also a welcome opportunity to meet with some of our Hong Kong graduate community where we are fortunate to have a very active and enthusiastic Alumni Association.

As exciting was the opportunity to visit the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, South China Normal University in Guangzhou. We intend to expand our relationships with both these institutions for example by developing opportunities for exchanges at PhD level with the research institutes which comprise the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. While in Beijing I had the privilege to sign our agreement for a Confucius Institute with Wuhan University, Wuhan. This Institute, housed in the centre of our campus will become a focus not only for our activities on China but for our region. These visits have helped to identify a range of future opportunities for Aberdeen to work with these excellent universities both in research and in student mobility which we are pursuing with colleagues across the Colleges.

Just a few days after returning from China, the University had the honour of hosting a lecture as part of the Scotland in Conversation with China series. Professor Lai Desheng, Dean of the School of Economics and Business Administration at the Beijing Normal University, gave a fascinating talk about the opportunities and challenges for Scotland in China and the First Minister, Alex Salmond, also gave an interesting speech on the Scottish Government's perspective of that relationship. David McMurtry did a great job of hosting Professor Lai and I hope, over the next few months, we will be able to build on the links with Beijing Normal.

PG Open Day

I spoke at both our Postgraduate Open Days earlier this month and it was encouraging to see a wide range of potential applicants attending. As colleagues will know, growing our postgraduate community is crucial to the success of the University, both academically and financially. It is, however, an increasingly competitive market and it is absolutely crucial that across the University we are doing all that we can to raise Aberdeen's profile and to make our offering as attractive to potential students as it possibly can be.

Local Schools

At the other end of the applicant spectrum, I was recently invited to visit Portlethen Academy to meet with some of their senior students and to talk to them about the challenges of global population growth and also about life in university. While the University's undergraduate population is drawn from across the world our links with local schools will always remain important to us and it was very interesting to spend time with what I thought were an impressive group of senior pupils at Portlethen. I know that other colleagues have been in a range of local schools and can I take this opportunity to thank everyone who takes part in this important activity. While on the subject of local schools I also had the opportunity, at the presentation of the awards for the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, to hear a great talk by Dr Adelyn Wilson on an initiative in the School of Law to enable school students to get a sense of what studying Law at university is really like. Not only was it a great talk but the initiative is absolutely at the centre of our mission.

Alzheimer's Disease

Many colleagues will have seen the recent news release regarding the announcement by TauRX Therapeutics Ltd of the launch of Phase 3 global clinical trials of their treatment for Alzheimer's disease. The treatment has been developed through research led by Professor Claude Wischik here at Aberdeen and it is an important example of Aberdeen's ability to translate research excellence to a commercial application that we hope could transform the lives of many.

Senate

Last week we had a very busy Senate meeting where we discussed a number of key issues including the Student Experience, our REF preparations, proposals to reform the common assessment scale and student admissions. An exciting development for the University was Senate's approval of the Working Group on the Academic Year's proposals to revise the structure of the academic year so that the whole of the first semester, including examinations, will be held before Christmas. While there is no algorithm that can identify the perfect solution Senate agreed with the Working Group that this solution offered the best model. We will be working together with colleagues towards implementing the changes to be in effect from 2014/15.

Remembrance Day Service

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all staff who were involved in the University Remembrance Day Service. The Service was well attended and, as ever, was conducted in a very dignified and moving manner. It is an important event and one that brings together the University community to remember the great sacrifice made by many of our students, graduates and staff.

PhD Journey

I was privileged to speak at the international conference organised by our PhD students which looked at all aspects of PhD study. Networking is a key part of the successful academic enterprise and it was brilliant that this conference was organised here in Aberdeen. As well as enabling students to discuss the many challenges that need to be surmounted before the excitement of the oral, the organisers had enlisted a star studded list of academics to share their experiences and arranged for everyone to enjoy the finer arts of a ceilidh! My thanks are due to everyone engaged in the organisation.

Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education

It was great to be asked to present the awards for this year's graduates on the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. The quality of the education we deliver is enhanced by programmes such as this and I was extremely impressed by the enthusiasm of colleagues from across the University who had both enjoyed and benefited from the programme. My thanks are due to everyone involved.

Winter Graduations

I look forward to the Winter Graduations next week and I hope that staff who have students graduating will be able to join us to celebrate the successful conclusion of their time at Aberdeen.

And finally

Wasn't it great to see our city ranked best place to live in Scotland and third in the UK in a recent survey? Let's not forget how much we, as a University, contribute to our City and Region and hence to making it a great place to live.

Best Regards

Ian Diamond

Principal and Vice-Chancellor