

Principal's Update December 2011

Colleagues

Regrettably I must begin this month's update by reflecting on the sad loss of two much loved members of the University family. Stephen Robertson, our Rector, was the well known member of *Scotland the What?*. As well as being one of Scotland's most loved entertainers, Stephen was a graduate of the University and his love for his *alama mater* was clear to all who knew him. At Court last Monday we received a letter from Stephen, written in November, in which he reflected on his time as Rector and made a number of interesting suggestions. We also lost Dr Peter MacConnell, Senior Lecturer in Engineering, who was a popular and respected member of staff. He will be greatly missed.

Graduations

In the third week of November the Chancellor and I presided over the Winter Graduations. Blessed by better weather than last year, the ceremonies were once again a great success. My thanks go out to the many people who are involved in making these events so special for the graduates and to all of our colleagues who at some point will have contributed to their education during their time at Aberdeen. We were also privileged to bestow Honorary Degrees on a number of distinguished individuals. Honorary Degrees are a wonderful opportunity for the University to recognise absolute excellence and may I invite colleagues to suggest names to Heads of College or directly to Godfrey Brown in Communications.

Visits to Schools

Since my last update I have had the opportunity to continue my regular series of visits to Schools. I always feel inspired by these visits as, in disparate areas dedicated colleagues are delivering a brilliant student experience and undertaking great research. I also value hugely the opportunity to talk to colleagues about the challenges facing us such as recruiting the best students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level or identifying new funding sources. I am looking forward very much to continuing these in the months to come.

Rebels with a Cause

It was with some pride last month that I joined Lord Wilson, Chancellor of the University, and Paul Grice, Chief Executive of The Scottish Parliament, at the opening of *Rebels with a Cause*, the first exhibition in the new Library's exhibition space. The exhibition was first displayed in The Scottish Parliament but it was wonderful to see our fabulous special collections being exhibited in this new dedicated exhibition space within the Library. It will, of course, be the first of many exhibitions to be held there and will help us to attract visitors from the wider community into the University. It was particularly impressive to see so many friends of the University at the opening and to hear their

enthusiasm for the Library. It is also exciting to see last week the reading room in the Special Collections centre in the building opening for business.

Talisman Scholarships

We were able, last week, to announce that Talisman were going to renew their Scholarship scheme. This was announced at a dinner to celebrate the achievements of the students they are currently supporting. It is a great example of the benefits that externally funded scholarships can bring, not only to the company and the student but to the University and I would hope we can attract more schemes like this in the years ahead.

What Uni?

Now I know there are countless league tables but with the introduction of RUK fees and undergraduate applicants being increasingly influenced by them we can't afford to ignore them. On this note it was really encouraging to see Aberdeen ranked in the Top 10 UK Universities by the *What Uni? Website*. This league table is fuelled solely by our students' perceptions and is a welcome reflection on the potential to achieve our first strategic objective.

Hong Kong

I had the pleasure of visiting Hong Kong in late October to undertake a series of meetings with high profile alumni and academic contacts at a number of universities with whom we are keen to strengthen our links. In both respects it was a very productive few days and it is clear there continues to be considerable opportunities for the University to engage with our alumni and to foster equally important academic opportunities with universities such as the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In working with the University of Hong Kong we are building on the historic contribution of our alumni to Hong Kong where in the nineteenth century Sir Patrick Manson and Sir James Cantlie, played a key role in the foundation of the Hong Kong College of Medicine, from which the University of Hong Kong was later established. It was exciting to see how our alumni continue to contribute to the life Hong Kong and that despite being on the other side of the world, they maintain a deep interest in the future of Aberdeen.

RSE Young Academy of Scotland

I was delighted to see that six Aberdeen academics -Dr Lisa DeBruine, Psychology, Dr Mirela Delibegovic, Biological Sciences, Professor Tom Greggs, Divinity, Dr David Lusseau, Biological Sciences, Professor Craig Ramsay, HSRU and Dr Jane Reid, Biological Sciences- have been appointed to the Royal Society of Edinburgh's new Young Academy of Scotland. This is designed to bring together some of the most able and innovative young academics, entrepreneurs, artists and professionals in Scotland to stimulate creative ideas and collaborative working on key Scottish and

global challenges. Each year the RSE will be inviting young academics to apply and I would very much encourage colleagues to consider doing so.

Finally, while I am not able to mention them all here, the past month has seen me invited to speak at a wide range of interesting events organised by colleagues on and off campus. As well as being enjoyable events in their own right, the number and diversity of events suggests Aberdeen continues to be a vibrant and stimulating intellectual community.

Best Regards

Ian Diamond

Principal and Vice-Chancellor