

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2013

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Hannaford, McGeorge, Morgan, Wallace, Greaves, MacGregor and Ross, Ms AM Slater, Professors Morrison, Craig, Coyle, Buckland, Skakle, Soulsby, Guz, Lumsden, Davies, Wells, Schaper, Dr Kee, Professor Connolly, Dr K Shennan, Dr M Ehrenscheidtner, Dr S Lawrie, Professors Lawrie and Coghill, Mr L Bebbington, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr K Friedrich, Dr DJ Smith, Dr Y Bain, Dr E Curtis, Ms S Cornelius, Dr G Sharman, Dr T Burns, Professor Duff, Dr A Simpson, Dr L Bennie, Dr M Bain, Dr J Sternberg, Dr D Lusseau, Dr M Pinard, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Greig, Dr J Barrow, Professor P Teismann, Dr S Tucker, Dr S Fielding, Dr J Hussein, Dr H Galley, Dr J Kyle, Dr K Khalaf, Dr L Aucott, Dr R MacKenzie, Dr C Black, Dr D Pearson, Dr P Bishop, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Dr M Kashtalyan, Professor Chandler, Dr J Keifer, Dr A Akisanya, Dr L Philip, Dr A McLaughlin, Dr F Guerin, Dr N Oren, Professor Hutchison, Miss M Dunn, Mr R Henthorn, Mr T Balsys, Mr D Delelis, Miss HL Smith, Miss J Molyneux, Mr R Islam, Mr T Stephen, Miss T Womersley, Miss J Franke, Mr M Amm, Mr A Swan, Mr S Gotsev, Mr S Adetelo and Miss K Gombert

Apologies: Professors Haites, Rodger, Zalewski, Baggs, McCaig, Macrae, Reid, Gow and Nelson, Dr J Masthoff, Dr D Hendry Mrs M Beaton, Professor Dawson, Dr R O'Connor, Dr A Dilley, Dr A Bryzgel, Professor P Mealar, Dr D Robson, Dr J Stewart, Dr T Wills, Dr K Groo, Dr D Hanschel, Dr P Bernhagen, Dr R Vij, Dr M Mills, Professor Lambin, Dr B Scott, Dr A Carrington, Dr D Scott, Dr A Rajnicek, Dr J Cleland, Dr A Denison, Dr LP Erwig, Dr S Semple, Professor Schwarzbauer, Professor S Heys, Dr M Cruickshank, Dr D Martin, Professor A Sahraie, Dr D Pokrajac, Professor D MacDonald, Professor TFJ Norman, Professor Coghill, Professor Edwards, Miss Z McKellar, Mr H Naio, Mr P McClenaghan and Mr B Amponsah

In opening the meeting, the Principal welcomed members to the first Senate of 2013–2014 and those members attending their first meeting in particular.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 1.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2013.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

- 2.1 The Principal welcomed the Senate to the first meeting of the academic year with a particular welcome to the new Senators, adding that the Senate was a vibrant and important forum for the discussion of University matters. The Principal began highlighting the importance of health and safety, mentioning two recent serious incidents that happily had had reasonable outcomes but which could have been avoided. The Principal emphasized that health and safety of staff and students was a number one priority for the University and it was critical that staff and students were vigilant always. The Principal went on to report that Court had met in October and had discussed student admissions and the student experience, research and REF, and the Scottish Code of Governance. The Scottish Code of Governance had resulted in a change in the size of Court. It had been decided that the number of Senate Assessors should remain the same, student numbers had increased by one and there was a small reduction in the numbers of senior staff and general members. This will be discussed further at the December meeting of Court. The Principal then reported that the Scottish Government had announced the budget for Scottish higher education a few weeks ago. Overall the University was in a similar position to last year, with a small amount of extra money as a result in a reduction of RUK student numbers. The Principal emphasized that a priority was a

unit of reserve for teaching and research. It was reported that the income from research continues to increase and credit was due to the staff who put in time and effort to obtain funding. The Principal emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to obtain funding and increase the number of applications, and added that the University needed to become more ambitious in its applications and more diverse in the bodies it was seeking funding from.

DELIVERING A HIGH QUALITY ON STUDENT EXPERIENCE – 2013

- 3.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) outlined the report on Delivering a High Quality on Student Experience 2013 (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal began by saying that the data showed clearly that the University continues to be successful in enhancing the student experience. Data from the Institutional Student Survey (ISS) showed improved levels of satisfaction across all the main areas of activity. The retention figures continued to show improvements with particular success in years 1 and 2. There was also a continued improvement in graduate level employment. The Vice-Principal thanked all staff across the University involved in initiatives to improve the student experience but added that there was (and would always be) more that the University could be doing, especially in terms of, widening participation, increasing the quality of the student experience, and retention. In widening participation, while there had been significant numbers of offers made by selectors, these had not then resulted in the student numbers expected. Offers appeared to be a weak predictor of conversion in this group. In terms of retention more specific markers were required to identify students who were at risk, such as engage with the VLE materials, numbers of library visits, and log ins. There was also more to do in relation to employability and employer engagement, including increased placements and employer projects for student groups.
- 3.2 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below.
- One member questioned whether the UK might move towards the student satisfaction and student engagement model used in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The Vice-Principal responded to say that the NSS was being reviewed and that was one of the proposed changes being considered.
 - One member asked what the annual operating budget was for widening participation across the University. the Vice-Principal said that he did not have those figures but that they would be provided. The Vice-Principal added that the use by SFC of SIMD as a measure of widening participation does not work well in the Northeast Scotland. In addition, the University made 220 offers to students in SIMD and only 30 of those accepted.
 - One member reported that it was already being shown that the new Personal Tutor system was picking up issues with students who might otherwise have dropped out and providing them with or directing them to appropriate support. It was added that simple measures such as handing back essays to students in person in order to give them one-to-one feedback was important in identifying students who were struggling.
 - The Vice-Principal thanked everyone for their comments.

OUTCOME AGREEMENT UPDATE

- 4.1 The Senior Vice-Principal updated the Senate on the University's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal reported that in 2012–2013 the Outcome Agreement was introduced as part of the condition of funding and that currently there were negotiations between the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the University regarding the Outcome Agreement. It was reported that the Outcome Agreement covers 3 years and there were no issues raised for 2012–2013. the University was currently looking at the 2013–2014 Agreement and the principal themes to be addressed (eg widening access, the learning journey, knowledge exchange, graduate skills, and sustainability). Additional places had been granted in some degree areas and for additional ISMD postcodes, there were also additional postgraduate taught places linked to

industry, and additional places linked to College articulations. All of these additional places had been filled apart from the new ISMD postcode places. The University would now begin work on some of the areas linked to the 2013–2014 Agreement, such as widening access, effective time spent on the learner journey, and entrepreneurship.

- 4.2 There were no questions.

STUDENT POPULATION 2013/14

- 5.1 The Senior Vice-Principal updated Senate on Student Population for 2013/14 (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal highlighted the main points of the paper. It was reported that postgraduate numbers had increased since last year except in the continuing professional development degrees. The number of non-fundable undergraduate students has fallen but the overall number of undergraduate students has increased. The University has managed its numbers of fundable students in order to compensate for over-recruitment in previous years in order to meet the SFC target but numbers of RUK students are also lower.
- 5.2 There were no questions.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW UPDATE

- 6.1 The Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) updated Senate on the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal reported that the ELIR Panel visit began in October and that the Panel met with staff and students. The Panel will return for further meetings. Senate will be updated on receipt of the Panel's findings and report. The Principal thanked all those who had been involved in what was a very important process for the University.
- 6.2 There were no questions.

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF) – REPORT ON INSTITUTIONAL PREPARATIONS

- 7.1 The Vice-Principal (Research & Knowledge Exchange) updated Senate on Research Excellence Framework (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal reported that the University was due to submit by 29 November. The University was submitting 25 units of assessment with around 600 members of staff included. The Vice-Principal thanked all members of staff who were involved in preparing the submission and added that the University would be informed of the outcome in December 2014.
- 7.2 There were no questions.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meeting on 2 October 2013.

1. Composition and Size of Court

- 8.1 The Court agreed, in principle, to reduce its size from 28 to 24 members and to begin the formal process and consultation required for the amendment of Ordinance No 133 to give effect to this.

The changes from the current composition that the Court approved to achieve this are:

- Reducing the number of Vice-Principal members from 3 to 1;
- Reducing the number of General Council Assessors from 4 to 2;
- Removing the position of Rector's Assessor as a member of Court (but the Rector's Assessor to be routinely in attendance and to act as an alternate member for the Rector should the Rector be absent);
- The addition of a second student member of Court.

The proposals do not include any changes to the Senate's representation on Court which is currently through 6 Senate Assessors (two from each College).

The Court will be invited to approve a draft Ordinance to give effect to these changes in December 2013, which, thereafter, will be brought to the Senate and General Council for comment.

2. Equality and Diversity

- 8.2 The Code includes a strong emphasis on governing bodies establishing goals and policies for equality and diversity within their memberships. The Court welcomed this and agreed that it should develop a general statement of intent on its commitment to achieving greater diversity across all categories of its membership including elected or externally appointed members.

The Court also agreed that it should adopt a goal of a minimum of 25% of its membership being female and that a number of initiatives proposed to progress equality and diversity within Court, and specifically the goal of 25% of its membership being female, are taken forward into an action plan and timeframe for further consideration by the Governance and Nominations Committee. These will include consideration of how the Court can achieve greater diversity in its elected membership, including Senate Assessors.

3. Senate Effectiveness Review

- 8.3 The Senate noted the Code's provisions regarding Senate Effectiveness Reviews. The Code states (Main Principle 16):

"The governing body shall keep its effectiveness under annual review. Normally not less than every five years, it shall undertake an externally-facilitated evaluation of its own effectiveness, and that of its committees, and ensure that a parallel review is undertaken of the senate/academic board and its committees. Effectiveness shall be assessed both against the Statement of Primary Responsibilities and compliance with this Code. The governing body shall, where necessary, revise its structure or processes, and shall require the senate/academic board of its Institution to revise its structure and processes accordingly."

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meetings on 30 October 2013, as under:

1. Accredited Prior Learning

- 9.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Policy on Accredited Prior Learning (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes).

2. Policy and Procedures on Student Absence

- 9.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the proposal to treat the submission of a 'self-certificate' in the same way as 'medical certificates' and 'good cause' and therefore (i) incur no resit charge and (ii) not appear on a student transcript.

3. Policy and Guidance on Religion and Belief for Students

- 9.3 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Policy and Guidance on Religion and Belief for Students (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

4. Dates and allocations for November 2012 graduations

9.4 Dates and allocations for November 2013 graduations

The Committee noted the dates and allocations for the November Graduation Ceremonies as summarised in below, approved by the Convenor during the summer.

Thursday 28 November at 11.00 a.m.

Higher and First Degrees in the Business School, Schools of Divinity, History & Philosophy and Education.

Thursday 28 November at 3.00 p.m.

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Language & Literature, Law and Social Science.

Friday 29 November at 11.00 a.m.

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Engineering and Geosciences.

Friday 29 November at 3.00 p.m.

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Biological Sciences, Medical Sciences, Medicine & Dentistry, Natural & Computing Sciences and Psychology.

5. Latest Dates for the Return of Examination Results

- 9.5 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had approved the latest dates for the return of examination results for 2013/14. These are now published at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/exam-results-and-change-of-marks-678.php

6. Undergraduate Resit Dates

- 9.6 Following discussions at the academic sub-group of the academic year implementation group it is proposed that the resit diet runs for two weeks commencing 19 July 2014. The Committee approved these proposed dates.

7. Centre for Academic Development Annual Report 2012/13

- 9.7 The Committee noted the Centre for Academic Development Annual Report for Academic Year 2012/13. The Committee agreed that the Report should be made widely available and be disseminated to colleagues with the Colleges as appropriate.

8. Report on the Working Group on Widening Participation

- 9.8 The Committee noted the report from the Working Group on Widening Participation, a joint working group of UCTL and the Advisory Group on Student Recruitment and Admissions (AGRSA).

9. Updates to the Academic Quality Handbook

- 9.9 The Committee noted that a number of updates to the Academic Quality Handbook which can be accessed at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/academic-quality-handbook-838.php.

10. Update on CAS & Grade Spectrum Review

- 9.10 The Committee noted that a modelling exercise of the proposed new model for determining degree classification had been undertaken and that, while for the majority of students there was no change to degree class between the old and new system there were some where degree class changed. Further work will be undertaken to establish whether further refinement of the new system is required.

11. Co-curricular Definition

- 9.11 The Committee noted the definition of co-curricular activity which had been agreed by Convener's permission over the summer.

What is the difference between co-curricular activities and extra-curricular activities?

The phrase 'co-curricular activities' refers to opportunities which complement the academic curriculum and which are recognised by the University (e.g. work placements, study abroad & volunteering). In comparison, involvement in off-campus community initiatives and/or other recreational activities are referred to as 'extra-curricular activities'. Both co-curricular activities and extra-curricular activities are important to students' personal development and their CV profile, and are valued by employers.

ONESOURCE STUDENT LIFECYCLE PROJECT UPDATE

- 10.1 The Senate noted the update on progress in regard to the OneSource Student Lifecycle Project (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).