

**ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK**

**SECTION 1**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN : AN OVERVIEW**

*This Section of the Academic Quality Handbook should be of general interest.*

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## **1.1 Introduction**

- 1.1.1 This Section of the Academic Quality Handbook outlines the University's history and its current constitution, mission and aims. It provides background information on Scottish academic structures; and it summarises the University's managerial and planning structures, and the arrangements for student support, teaching and learning, assessment and monitoring. An outline of the University's arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement is also provided.

## **1.2 History and Constitution**

- 1.2.1 For 267 years there were two separate universities in Aberdeen, each with its own statutory rights and degree-granting privileges. The first, King's College, was founded in Old Aberdeen by William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen, under a papal bull dated 10 February 1495. The second, Marischal College, was founded in New Aberdeen by George Keith, Fifth Earl Marischal of Scotland, under a charter dated 2 April 1593. The two colleges remained rival institutions until 15 September 1860, when a Royal Ordinance united them under the title of the "University of Aberdeen". Before the union of 1860, each of the two Universities was governed by its Chancellor supported by the Principal, the Rector and the Senatus Academicus or Senate.
- 1.2.2 King's College was the third University to be established in Scotland, following St Andrews (1411) and Glasgow (1451). Together with the University of Edinburgh (1583), these first Scottish Universities are generally referred to as "the four ancients". Their governance was prescribed by the Universities (Scotland) Act of 1858 which created the University Court and other such instruments "for the better government and discipline of the Universities of Scotland": the latter included the General Council (or assembly of graduates). The Senatus also retained its authority to regulate the teaching programmes and its responsibilities for discipline. The Universities (Scotland) Act of 1889 confirmed the structure of the University Court and invested it with major new powers, including the sole responsibility "to administer and manage the whole revenue and property of the University". The 1889 Act remains in force, with minor modification only.
- 1.2.3 Further information on the University's History, and details of its Constitution, can be found towards the beginning of the University Calendar (up to 1996-97), copies of which are available in the Sir Duncan Rice Library.

## **1.3 Ambition, Mission and Aims**

- 1.3.1 The University's ambition is 'to build on our history to enhance the University of Aberdeen's reputation as one of the world's leading universities.'
- 1.3.2 The University's mission is to 'be recognised throughout the world as a renowned international university, focussing on society's future needs and challenges, employing the best staff and delivering a unique and stimulating intellectual experience for students.'
- 1.3.3 The University of Aberdeen is the major institution of higher education in the North of Scotland. From this distinctive position our aim is to lead the development of education and research across our region. By continuously enhancing the quality of all our activities, and by developing regional alliances, we aim to become a world-class University.

- 1.3.4 The University's Strategic Plan, which can be accessed through the University's Web pages<sup>1</sup>, sets out the University's Mission, targets, and strategies in its key areas of activity.

## **1.4 The Governance and Academic Structures of the University**

### **The University Court**

- 1.4.1 The scope of the Court's powers and its composition are defined by the various Acts of Parliament, as amended by Ordinance and amplified by Resolution. These powers include the University Court being charged with the administration and management of the revenue and property of the University.
- 1.4.2 The University Court has a majority of lay members, including Assessors elected or appointed by the General Council, by Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils, by the Chancellor and by the Rector, as well as co-opted members. Assessors are also elected by the Senatus Academicus and there is provision for at least one student member.

#### *Ordinances*

- 1.4.3 An Ordinance is a further definition, clarification or stipulation of existing powers, as prescribed by Acts of Parliament. The passing of an Ordinance requires a detailed process of internal consultation before it is submitted for the consent of the Privy Council. In practice, this means that the Court must consult with the General Council, the Senate and the wider community.

#### *Resolutions*

- 1.4.4 A Resolution represents the elucidation of a power which is within the Court's own competence to enact. In practice, it requires the General Council and Senate to be consulted and for representations to be sought within the community. To satisfy the latter requirement, it is necessary for Draft Resolutions to be on public display (on the University's central noticeboards) for a stipulated period of weeks.

### **The Senatus Academicus (The Senate)**

- 1.4.5 The Senate is charged with the regulation and superintendence of the teaching and discipline of the University, and with the promotion of research. It is on the authority of the Senate that all degrees are conferred. The Principal is President of the Senate.
- 1.4.6 The Senate<sup>2</sup> has overall responsibility for all academic matters relating to teaching and research. Chaired by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, its membership includes all Vice-Principals, Heads of College, Heads of School, elected representatives of the academic and research staff of each School, representatives of AUSA and a number of *ex officio* members who hold University, College or School appointments.

### **The Colleges**

- 1.4.7 The University's academic activities are structured into three Colleges: Arts & Social Sciences, Life Sciences & Medicine and Physical Sciences.

<sup>1</sup> [www.abdn.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan.php)

<sup>2</sup> [www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/senate/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/senate/)

- 1.4.8 Each College comprises the Schools and other such academic units as may be assigned to it by the University Court on the recommendation of the Senate. For electoral purposes, each College consists of the Professors, Readers, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers and the holders of research and academic-related posts of equivalent status in those Schools and units assigned to that College.
- 1.4.9 To a large extent, each College is free to make its own administrative and managerial arrangements. For example, each College has created a number of different committees for specific functions, such as the promotion of teaching and learning, and the promotion of research. In accordance with Resolution No. 231 of 2003, however, each College is required to maintain the following standing bodies:

*College Executive:* This group meets, ordinarily, at least once a month and is the locus for strategic planning and decision-making. Each Executive comprises the Head of College, the Heads of School, the Director of Teaching & Learning, the Head of Graduate School, the Director of Research, and the College Registrar. Other staff are invited to attend as required.

*College Council:* This group meets, ordinarily, at least twice per half-session to enhance communications within Colleges. It includes elected representatives from the academic constituencies and representation for non-academic members of staff, and students. The proportion from each constituency is determined by each College, following appropriate consultation. The Council reviews, advises and informs College academic planning.

*College Forum:* This group meets, ordinarily, at least once a year and comprises all members of staff of the College. The Forum facilitates communication and open discussion on issues affecting the College and its staff.

*Research Committee:* The responsibility of the Research Committee includes REF planning and direction, prioritisation of research, preparation of bids for internal and external resources, directing research opportunities and monitoring and reviewing research and commercialisation performance.

*Teaching & Learning Committee:* The responsibility of the Teaching & Learning Committee includes College-wide responsibility for course and programme academic planning, reviewing current provision, student recruitment and retention, and quality assurance and quality enhancement and related matters. The membership includes student representation.

## **1.5 Managerial and Planning Structures**

### **Senior Management**

- 1.5.1 The Principal and Vice-Chancellor is the most senior academic and administrative officer of the University. The Principal is supported by the Senior Vice-Principal and Vice-Principals (who have a specific, University-wide remit), by the Heads of College (who are also Vice-Principals), and by the Secretary to the University, who is the Head of Professional Services.
- 1.5.2 The executive Senior Management Team (SMT), which comprises the Vice-Principals (including Heads of College and University Secretary), and the University Management Group (UMG) which in addition to SMT members includes Directors of administrative sections, advise the Principal on developing and monitoring institutional strategic direction, academic planning and cross-College and external collaborative developments.

## Colleges, Schools and other Units

- 1.5.3 The University undertakes teaching in over 40 disciplines: these are consolidated into Schools which are grouped for planning and managerial purposes into Colleges, as listed in Appendix 1.1.
- 1.5.4 Each College is managed by a **Head of College**, who is supported by Directors of Research and Teaching & Learning, the Head/Director of the Graduate School and by a College Registrar, with appropriate Assistant College Registrars and clerical support. Resources are allocated to Colleges by the University Court, on the basis of costed academic plans. Budgets are allocated to Schools by Heads of College in consultation with their advisory committees. The University Librarian allocates a book fund budget to each School in consultation with the relevant Head of College.
- 1.5.5 **Heads of College** report to the Senior Vice-Principal. Working with their Directors of Research and Teaching & Learning and Head of Graduate School, they are responsible, *inter alia*, for the quality of educational provision and research within their College.
- 1.5.6 **Heads of School** are responsible to the relevant Head of College for the management of all activities within their School, including the distribution of resources from within their allocated budgets and for the organisation and satisfactory delivery of all teaching and learning activities and research.
- 1.5.7 Each College has a Teaching and Learning Committee which considers, *inter alia*, all proposals from Schools to establish new, or amend or withdraw existing, courses and programmes. College Teaching and Learning Committees determine whether proposals are in accord with the College's and School's academic and strategic plans, and whether adequate resources are available to support a proposal. Once approved by the College, proposals are referred to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for academic approval (paragraph 1.10.3 and [Section 3](#) refer).
- 1.5.8 The Continuing Professional Development Team, within Research and Commercialisation, is the University's central focus for externally-delivered continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. The team provides support for all Schools to develop and deliver cost-recovery, work-related programmes to people at work. Provision includes postgraduate qualifications, short non credit-bearing courses, conferences, funded programmes, in-company training and professional updating.

## 1.6 The University and Scottish Academic Structures

- 1.6.1 The structure of undergraduate degree programmes and the admissions system at Aberdeen follow the traditional Scottish model and are generally different from those to be found elsewhere in the United Kingdom. While Admissions Selectors recognise many types of School-leaving Qualifications (A-levels, the International Baccalaureate, European Qualifications, etc) and also a variety of qualifications offered by mature applicants, most students are admitted on the basis of the Scottish Certificate of Education Standard Grade (taken normally in year S4), and Higher and Advanced Higher Grade (taken normally in years S5 or S6) qualifications. Scottish undergraduate degree structures are designed to articulate with the Scottish schools system.

- 1.6.2 While there is a limited choice of curriculum available in 'professional' courses such as Medicine, Dentistry, Law, Education, Engineering and Divinity (where to a greater or lesser extent course content and order of study are prescribed and applicable to all), elsewhere students have a wide range of options in choosing their subjects, particularly in the first two years of study. **At Aberdeen students are admitted to a degree** e.g. BSc (Pure Science) or MA, rather than to a specified degree programme, *although potential Honours students indicate an Honours intention on entry* (e.g. French, French-History, Biology). Entry to Honours takes place at the end of year 2 or 3, depending on the degree programme, and many students are able to keep several different Honours options open until that point. Students in their second and subsequent years may, and frequently do, register for a degree programme different from that which they nominated at registration the previous year. Progression rates between years of study therefore need to be considered on the basis of a degree, e.g. the MA, rather than an individual degree programme.
- 1.6.3 In November 2007 the University began a comprehensive Curriculum Reform process to review what and now we provide for our students. After extensive reflection and widespread consultation within and outwith the University, a *Report* setting out a range of proposals to modify the structure, content, delivery and flexibility of our degrees and other awards to ensure that they address the needs of leavers, employers and other stakeholders was prepared. Since their endorsement by Senate in November 2008, the University has been working towards a staged implementation of the proposals, beginning with those applying to provide our students with enhanced opportunities to become more academically excellent, more intellectually flexible and more committed to personal development. Curriculum Reform is now three years into a five-year implementation phase. The reforms for final year undergraduate students on four-year programmes take effect from the start of the 2013-2014 and those for postgraduates and final year undergraduates on a five-year programme, from 2014- 2015. It is intended that students will have enhanced opportunities to develop skills as critical thinkers and effective communicators, and to be better prepared to become active citizens. Further details of our Curriculum Reform project are accessible at [www.abdn.ac.uk/cref/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/cref/).
- 1.6.4 Each year around 800 students are admitted as non-graduating students following one or more courses. These include part-time students, and visiting full-time students from other Higher Education Institutions. We also admit European student through the ERASMUS scheme: [Section 6](#) (sub-section 6.3) refers.
- 1.6.5 The University has run a successful Access to Degree Studies programme for a number of years, which is taught by University staff and can be taken over a one-year or two-year period by those wishing to prepare themselves for entry to higher education, or as a qualification in its own right. A successful Summer School for Access programme has operated since 1991. This is attended each year by well over 100 students, the vast majority of whom complete their studies satisfactorily and subsequently enter higher education at this or another University.
- 1.6.6 Postgraduate taught students are admitted to a particular programme of study (Certificate/Diploma/Degree) in a named discipline, while research students are admitted to a Master's degree by Research or to the degree of PhD on a specified topic in one or more departments.
- 1.6.7 All students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, are assigned for administrative and regulatory purposes to one of seven **Areas of Study**: Arts & Social Sciences; Education; Science; Engineering; Divinity; Law; Medicine & Dentistry.

- 1.6.8 All degrees and awards offered by the University are compliant with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The Framework was published by the QAA in 2001 and sets out a common national framework for all awards in Scotland. It makes clear the relationships between qualifications and clarifies entry and exit points and routes for progression between awards. Further information is available at [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)
- 1.6.9 The levels used by the University are aligned with the SCQF as follows:-
- AU Level 1 = SCQF 7
  - AU Level 2 = SCQF 8
  - AU Level 3 = SCQF 9
  - AU Level 4 = SCQF 10
  - AU Level 5 = SCQF 11
- 1.6.10 As part of the Curriculum Reform process, a Framework of Degrees was produced. This takes account of the SCQF and sets out the range of degrees (and sub-degree awards) offered by the University (see [Appendix 1.2](#)).

## **1.7 Student Support**

- 1.7.1 The University recognises that a well-developed system of student support is essential if students are to get the best from their studies. Student Support at the University consists of the Student Advice and Support Office, the University Counselling Service and the Community Liaison Officer who, with a team of Student Resident Assistants, provides support to students in University-managed Halls of Residence.
- 1.7.2 The Student Advice and Support Office provides immigration advice for international students, oversees provision for disabled students, and provides a range of advice, information and support for all students in regard to matters such as financial assistance and other issues. In addition, the University has a Chaplaincy Centre, which provides support to students of all faiths and none and the Students' Association's Student Advice Centre provides advice and representation for students. There are several NHS GP services located close to campus. Further details of the support available to students are provided in [Section 5](#).
- 1.7.3 At the level of institutional policy and strategic development, there is a Student Affairs Committee (a joint committee of Court and Senate), and an Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity. Student representatives serve on each of those committees. There is regular liaison between the Head of Student Support Services and the student sabbatical officers, as well as between the Director of Student Life and the General Manager of the Students' Association. There is also a Student Support Forum, a monthly informal meeting of various staff involved with supporting students in various ways (e.g. Student Support Services, Careers Service, Colleges, Registry, Students' Association, Student Learning Service).

## **1.8 Teaching and Learning Practice**

- 1.8.1 The University has operated a modular structure at undergraduate level since 1990. The academic session is divided into two half-sessions, each consisting of a twelve-week teaching period followed by a three- or four-week period for revision and end-of-course assessment. **Undergraduate programmes** are organised into discrete courses (modules), normally extending over the period of half an academic session. Each course is designed to be at a particular "level" of study (Levels 0-5) and is assigned a credit value based on 1 credit

point being equivalent to 10 hours of notional student effort (including the formal revision and end-of-course assessment period). The University Calendar stipulates the number of credits (and level) required for the award of a degree, diploma or certificate. Some courses (e.g. field courses or modules of the Summer School for Access programme) are offered outwith the above structure.

- 1.8.2 The University has preserved the academic coherence of its undergraduate programmes within a modular structure, particularly at Honours level, by designating “pathways” which must be followed by students wishing to obtain a degree with Honours in a particular discipline.
- 1.8.3 The majority of **postgraduate taught programmes** have been organised on a modular basis with effect from the session 1998-99.
- 1.8.4 The supervision and training of **postgraduate research students** follows the traditional UK university pattern, with students being assigned to one or more disciplines under the direct guidance of a Supervisor(s) and the overall responsibility of the Head(s) of School. Students working in one of the local research institutes will also have a member or members of staff of that institute as a supervisor. A generic Postgraduate Structured Management Framework for research students, which identifies the responsibilities of students, Supervisors and Heads of School in regard to the successful supervision and training of a research student. The Framework identifies timescales and events as a guide for the completion of the research, writing-up, and the submission of a thesis. It was intended that Schools and Colleges modify the Frameworks to suit their needs. It is described in more detail in [Section 8](#).
- 1.8.5 The University currently offers over 450 Degree, Diploma and Certificate programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate taught level. .
- 1.8.6 The University maintains an Undergraduate Code of Teaching Practice and Codes of Practice for Postgraduate Taught Students and for Postgraduate Research Students. [Section 5](#) and [Section 6](#) refer.

<b>1.9 Assessment and Monitoring</b>
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**General**

- 1.9.1 In general, the University seeks to follow a mixed method of assessment, as appropriate to the nature of individual courses.
- 1.9.2 **For undergraduate courses** the method of assessment for each course is identified in the Catalogue of Courses.
- 1.9.3 An outline of the method of assessment **for postgraduate taught programmes** and, where relevant, their constituent courses, can be found in the University Calendar and/or the Postgraduate Catalogue of Courses. Details can also be obtained from the programme’s sponsoring department.
- 1.9.4 The following policies and practices, which operate within the University’s Single Equality and Diversity Scheme ([www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-governance-and-compliance/Equality Outcomes Scheme 29 April 2013 2.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-governance-and-compliance/Equality%20Outcomes%20Scheme%2029%20April%202013%202.pdf)), have been designed to

assure the quality of the student teaching and learning experience, and to safeguard and maintain the academic standards associated with the University's programmes and awards. The University's policy in regard to academic standards is provided in [Section 3](#). Full details of the University's assessment and external examining policies and practices for taught programmes can be found in [Section 7](#) and [Section 9](#).

### **Common Assessment Scale (CAS)**

- 1.9.5 To enable students and the University to compare more easily the level of performance in different subjects, and as part of the University's mechanisms for monitoring academic standards, the University introduced a Common Assessment Scale (CAS) for assessments in 1992. Its use since then has been compulsory throughout the University for the reporting of marks obtained in coursework and class examinations to undergraduate students. In addition, the Senate decided that the overall (CAS) mark for each course obtained by undergraduates in prescribed degree assessments should be disclosed to them. Since 1995/96, Schools have been required to inform postgraduate students of their CAS marks for courses comprising the taught components of postgraduate programmes. Details of the Common Assessment Scale, which is applicable to both undergraduate and the taught components of postgraduate programmes, are given in [Section 7](#). At the time of writing, the University's Common Assessment Scale is under review.

### **Marking Policies**

- 1.9.6 The standard of the results for written examination scripts that are taken as part of an Honours or Postgraduate taught programme are assured by a system of double-marking which requires, as a minimum, a range of scripts to be double-marked. This is described further in [Section 7](#).
- 1.9.7 Since 1999 the University has had a policy of anonymous marking of all written examination scripts at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In 2012, the practice of anonymous (blind) marking was extended to include in-course assessment. This is described further in [Section 7](#).

### **Examination Rules**

- 1.9.8 Rules for the Conduct of Prescribed Degree Assessments were approved by the Senate in 1994 and modified in 2008, which identify *inter alia* the responsibilities of Heads of School and Invigilators as well as candidates. These are described further in [Section 7](#).

### **Grade Spectrum for Determining Degree Classification**

- 1.9.9 In 1996, the Senate approved procedures for determining honours degree classification in all degree programmes (the *Grade Spectrum*), which superseded the previous guidelines applicable in respect of joint degree programmes only. Following a review of the *Grade Spectrum*, minor modifications were implemented in 1998. As part of the process of ensuring compliance of honours degrees with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), a further review of the *Grade Spectrum* was undertaken during 2003/04, 2004/05 and a minor change was implemented in 2008. At the time of writing the Undergraduate Grade Spectrum is under review.

## Monitoring and the SCEF exercise

- 1.9.10 Since 1990/91 all departments have been required to obtain student evaluation at the end of each undergraduate course by means of a Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF). The University's procedures for obtaining student and graduate feedback were reviewed in 2009/10 with revised online SCEF forms being introduced for use at the beginning of the 2011/12 academic year. The outcome of the SCEF exercise is considered initially at School level and then at University level. Further details are provided in [Section 3](#).
- 1.9.11 Student performance during courses is monitored by Schools in two ways. The first is to ensure that students are duly attending and performing the work of their classes, and is designed *inter alia* to ensure that the requirements of grant-awarding bodies and other sponsors are met and to meet the monitoring requirements set down by the UK Borders Agency in regard to those students entering the UK under the Tier 4 visa regulations (see [Section 6.6](#)). Secondly, each School has mechanisms for providing feedback to students on the quality of their work. This consists, in general, of the return of written work and the assessment of students' performance in small group teaching (laboratories or tutorials as appropriate) [[Section 7](#) also refers]. Successful attendance and completion of in-course assignments results in undergraduates being awarded a Class Certificate, which permits entry to the related end-of-course assessments ([Section 6](#) refers). All new undergraduate entrants are advised to consult online Important Information for Students' documentation which describes *inter alia* mechanisms for monitoring student attendance, performance and assessment.

### 1.10 The Assurance and Enhancement of Academic Quality and Standards in Teaching and Learning

- 1.10.1 The Senatus Academicus (Senate) is responsible to the University Court for ensuring that satisfactory policies and procedures are in place for safeguarding the academic standards of the University's awards, and for the assurance, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the University's educational provision. The University's success in this regard is monitored externally through periodic visits by external quality review teams and professional and statutory bodies.
- 1.10.2 An overview of quality assurance in UK higher education is given in [Section 2](#). Details of the University's arrangements for the assurance and enhancement of academic quality and standards in teaching and learning are given in [Section 3](#).
- 1.10.3 **In summary**, the Senate has devolved responsibility to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning to undertake the detailed consideration and development of teaching and learning policy and to make appropriate recommendations to the Senate. The Quality Assurance Committee validates course and programme proposals following review by the College Teaching and Learning Committees, and are responsible, *inter alia*, for the regulation of students' studies and the provision of arrangements for student academic support.

### 1.11 Management Information and the Student Record

- 1.11.1 Since September 1995, the University has maintained a copy of its student record system in the form of an ORACLE database; and in July 1997 this form of the record became the live system using Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) software, supplemented by screens and reports developed locally. Support for the Student Record

System was brought in-house over an 18-month period, which commenced in December 2001, and concluded at the end of July 2003. The record, which is available widely throughout the institution and also to staff working off-campus over the Web, is replicated nightly to the University's data warehouse, where it forms a core element of the University's corporate Management Information Systems. It can be accessed by Colleges, Schools and Senior Managers using networked end-user tools - including Oracle Business-Intelligence Products - for purposes related both to quality assurance and to resource allocation and management. Students are able to access their computerised student record, including the ability to update their personal data on-line, using Portals technology, through their University computer accounts. On-line registration, including the functionality to settle fees by e-payment, was introduced in September 2006; and on-line approval of curricula has now replaced paper-based systems in many areas of the University. The University's local database for undergraduate admissions through UCAS was replaced and enhanced to cover non-UCAS/GTTR (including postgraduate) applicants in 2000, to integrate with the Student Record System, and can be interrogated in the same way as the main system. In January 2013, the University initiated a five-year programme, **OneSource**, to procure and implement a single-supplier enterprise resource planning (ERP) product to support the review, improvement and integration of our student, research and administrative processes. This approach will, in the longer term, replace our current, individual and somewhat outdated Student Records, Admissions, Research Management, Human Resources, Payroll and Pensions, Finance and Procurement, Estates and CRM systems into one simple and coordinated structure in order to more effectively manage the applicant-student-alumni life-cycle, staff research, human resources and finance across the University.

- 1.11.2 The Registry provides Colleges and Schools, on request, with a wide range of customised *ad hoc* or scheduled data relating to entrance scores, student load, pass/fail rates, student progression, degree classifications and related areas.

## **1.12 Freedom of Information and Data Protection**

### **Freedom of Information**

- 1.12.1 Since 1 January 2005 members of the public (which includes staff and students) have had rights under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) to be told, on request, whether the University holds particular recorded information and, if so, to receive a copy of it. These rights apply to historical, as well as current, records; and a person does not need to cite FOISA in order to be able to exercise them, though requests must be made in a form (e.g. letter, fax or e-mail) which is capable of preservation.
- 1.12.2 Practical implications of FOISA in the area of Academic quality are as follows:
- Since 1 September 2004 the University has been required to have in place a Publication Scheme which, *inter alia*, gives details of its Quality procedures and access to related statistical data: this will include the information contained in this Handbook. Information included in the Publication Scheme does not require to be provided in response to individual requests. The second edition of this Scheme was approved in 2009.
  - Schools can expect themselves to receive requests for information, both statistical and in relation to their policies and procedures, as well as in relation to research and/or consultancy being undertaken by them; and, unless one of the detailed exemptions in

the Act applies, to respond to them. While exemptions exist, for example, in relation to ongoing research which is intended for future publication, or where disclosure would prejudice the University's or an individual's commercial interests, the majority of these are subject to either or both of a public interest and substantial prejudice test – with the presumption being in favour of disclosure.

- While data relating to individual staff or students is exempt from FOISA, a Statutory Order which came into force at the same time has extended Subject Access rights under the Data Protection Act 1998 to personal data which is held in unstructured manual datasets – e.g. to files the contents of which are organised in chronological order.

1.12.3 It is not the intention that FOISA should prevent the everyday release of information that the University has been happy to disclose in the past, or that new bureaucratic structures should be established to handle requests. If, however, any member of staff receives a request for information that they are unwilling to release, or where they are uncertain, they should refer in the first instance:

- in the case of academic staff to their College Registrar
- in the case of support services to their Head of Service or Section.

1.12.4 If the appropriate person, as identified above, is unsure whether information requested should be disclosed, or where it is estimated more than one person-day of staff time may be required to respond to a request and a fee may therefore be chargeable, then they should refer to the University's Freedom of Information Officer.

1.12.5 Further information on Freedom of Information is available at:

[www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/freedom-of-information-254.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/freedom-of-information-254.php)

### **Data Protection**

1.12.6 Schools should be aware that the Data Protection Act 1998 gives students the right to request access to personal data relating to them, including since 2005 data held in manual datasets which are not structured by reference to individuals. This could include examination scripts, sub-course marks and copies of references received (though not references given) regarding them.

1.12.7 If a School receives a formal request from a student for disclosure of personal data held by the School on the student, the School should refer the request to the University's Data Protection Officer.