



PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

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Colleagues

Spending Review

Following the UK Spending Review on 25 November we gained greater knowledge of the future structure of research funding in the UK. The Research Councils will remain but will work together under the banner of Research UK, which will be governed by a Board including senior scientists. This was one of the key recommendations of the Review chaired by Sir Paul Nurse, a review accepted in full by the Chancellor who also protected research funding in real terms as well as providing extra funds for some global challenges. This funding boost is very welcome.

We have also received very recently news of the resulting Scottish Budget. Protection of health, education and the police means that other areas, including higher education, will receive in 2016/17 significant cuts. Unlike Westminster the impending Scottish elections mean that we only have a one year budget settlement. The implications for the

University will not be properly known until the New Year, but it is clear that we will need to manage our budgets carefully over the next year as we will receive significantly less money from the Scottish Government. However, I want to make it clear that the University remains in a very healthy position and that with the outstanding teaching that I know has been taking place across the University this term - accompanied by wonderful research exemplified by some of the successes highlighted below - we will continue to flourish in all areas of our activity.

As we move into Christmas and the New Year, I would like to thank everyone across the University for their commitment and drive to take the University forward. I also recognise that the first semester is a long one and would urge everyone to switch off their emails and have a really good break so as to return refreshed in the New Year.



Winter Grads

Our winter graduations were, as always, enjoyable and inspiring, with one of our largest ever Christmas trees creating a very special atmosphere for the proud families, friends and teaching colleagues celebrating the culmination of years of dedication and hard work. It was a pleasure to meet our new honorary graduates and to present the first Benefactor to the University Award to Dr Ronnie Scott Brown for his long and generous support to our campus and many aspects of the work of our academic staff.

The quality of our graduation speeches is consistently outstanding, and I was struck in particular by the words of colleagues who all delivered brilliant addresses.

In addition, I want to add my congratulations to the three recipients of College Teaching Awards: Srinivas Sriramula of the College of Physical Sciences, Aileen Ackland of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, and Steve Tucker who received the College of Life Sciences and Medicine award.

Research funding and impacts

I'm delighted to hear of the recent funding awards secured by colleagues in Divinity History and Philosophy. Funding opportunities in the humanities are limited, so this represents a great run of success for History and Art History with Jackson Armstrong, Robert Frost, Jane Geddes, Hannah Burrows and Andrew McKillop securing funding awards totalling over £0.5 million in the space of a week. We are also awaiting confirmation of a further £1.2m to our colleagues in Theology from the Kirby Laing Trust.

The ArabTrans project gained considerable international exposure last week with a plenary meeting in Rome attended by the UK and UAE Ambassadors. Andrea Teti of our Politics and International Relations team also represented ArabTrans and our University at the Rome MED

delegates including Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and US Secretary of State John Kerry. Andrea contributed to a panel debate on conflict and transition in Libya, which ArabTrans also helped organise.

Highly significant awards are coming to our School of Engineering, including £288k from the National Environment Research Council (NERC) for Chris Soulsby for The Transmissive Critical Zone, two Horizon 2020 awards for John Nelson for social transport systems for the future (ESPRIT – EUR 321k and Social Car – EUR 360k) and Gorry Fairhurst has received EUR 437k for work on middleboxes and the internet.

Paul Hallett in Biological Sciences has secured funding from NERC and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) for a UK-China consortium (over £2m, Aberdeen receiving £610k) to study interactions between biogeochemical cycling in red soils. Pete Smith led a successful UK-China consortium (UK contribution £2.4m, Aberdeen receiving £750k) for a virtual joint centre for nitrogen use and pollution from agriculture, and Jo Smith was co-applicant on a successful UK-India consortium for a virtual centre on nitrogen efficiency of whole-cropping systems in agriculture. Meanwhile more success for the online greenhouse gas calculator Cool Farm Tool with Jon Hillier awarded £98k for his NERC Innovation project to including perennial crops. I want also to congratulate Tyler Stevenson in Biological Sciences on being awarded an Early Career Impact Award from the Federation of Associations in Behavioural and Brain Sciences (FABBS) Foundation. Well done Tyler, this is a great achievement.

Evaluation by the Environment and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) on the impact of Digital Economy research culminated in an event at the British Library in which 11 projects from across the UK were demonstrated to influential policymakers, businesses and third sector leaders. Philip Nelson, CEO of the EPSRC, highlighted Aberdeen's achievements in Natural Language Generation technology in his opening address, and Advait Siddharthan in Computing Science presented dot.rural projects BeeWatch and Blogging Birds. These two projects were also among eight from around the UK to feature in the Research Council UK's impact report *Celebrating Success in the Digital Economy*.

Our internationally renowned Aberdeen Fungal Group has gained a further award of nearly £2.5m from the Medical Research Council for work led by Al Brown to investigate the role *Candida* plays in the body, and how it can cause thrush in both healthy and severely ill people. The Group has just been selected to exhibit Killer Fungus at the 2016 Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition, the UK's leading annual science showcase – another example of the University's outstanding efforts to engage the public with research.

Among the highlights of our hosting of the British Science Festival back in 2012 was the huge media coverage of Abha Maheshwari's work on the use of frozen embryos in IVF treatment. I'm delighted to hear that Dr Maheshwari and her team will begin the first ever trial in the UK to compare the success of frozen embryos and 'fresh' embryos, funded by a £1.5m award from the National Institute for Health Research.



Project 500

As colleagues will be aware, our Strategic Plan has set us on a pathway for growth, and a part of this is to boost our internationalisation activity and student numbers. We have given ourselves stretching targets for next year, and I recently established a small task force to take forward a way of achieving these numbers in a cohesive and co-ordinated way. I have been very pleased to witness the team working of this group made up of colleagues from Schools, Student Recruitment, External Relations and IT, and look forward to seeing results for this group in support of our internationalisation targets.

Scottish Affairs Committee

The Scottish Affairs Committee relocated from Westminster to our Linklater Rooms late in November as part of its inquiry into post-study work schemes for international students who have attended further or higher education institutions in Scotland. Prior to 2012, international students could apply for a dedicated post-study work visa to remain and work in the UK after completing their studies.

The Committee is examining what impact the closure of this scheme has had on industry and the competitiveness of higher education institutions, and looking at what Scottish and UK governments have done to investigate the feasibility of a scheme allowing international students to remain in Scotland and contribute to the economy. I was pleased to be asked to give evidence at this meeting, and that a group of international students had the opportunity to meet the Committee chaired by Pete Wishart MP and including local representative Kirsty Blackman MP. In my evidence I highlighted the long term benefit that international students bring to Scotland whether or not they return home at the end of their studies and urged the Committee to lobby for a return to two years post study work being easily available.

Health and wellbeing

Many of us will no doubt return after the festive break resolved to get fitter and healthier, and our first Health and Wellbeing Day on Friday 8 January is well timed to showcase the facilities and expertise we have on our campuses to help us do just that.

The day will be packed with opportunities to find out more about diet, exercise, stopping smoking, cancer awareness and more. So, for those of us keen to battle our BMI, become a first aider - or learn more about mindfulness - please check the updated programme [here](#) and get this date in your diary.

In the coming months we will also be introducing new initiatives to remind colleagues of simple actions which can make a huge difference to the health, safety and wellbeing of our whole community.



University of Aberdeen Development Trust

The Development Trust's Disbursement Committee met in November to agree best use of almost £200k in unrestricted gifts to benefit students throughout the University. The Committee agreed sums of money which will support students' studies through practical help including travel, purchase of equipment and conference fees. Funds were also allocated to scholarships in all Colleges over many subjects and to the AUSA Student Experience Fund for students' clubs and societies. The Development Trust Student Experience Fund gained additional funds to support services and extracurricular activities such as Nightline, the Healthy Body Healthy Mind Campaign, the Around the World in Many Faiths project, the Student Garden, and the ever-popular Student Show. Elite athletes who have the potential to excel in their chosen sport will also be supported through the Sports Bursary Programme. I thank all our loyal donors and alumni who are making all of this possible.

City Region progress

Work continues on the City Region Deal, and I am grateful to colleagues who are working on various aspects of this ambitious funding bid which could deliver £2.9 billion from the UK and Scottish Governments for a range of infrastructure, housing and innovation improvements across north-east Scotland. It was exciting to hear Chancellor George Osborne reference the Aberdeen bid in his recent Spending Review.

The 'people' element of this bid is coming together under the leadership of Sir Ian Wood who has donated £25m to the newly formed Opportunity North East (ONE) group, with board members including myself and Stephen Logan whose knowledge and experience in life sciences research and innovation in this region will surely be a huge asset. ONE is expected to benefit from a further £25m of co-investment from Scottish Enterprise and other public and private sector sources.

As part of this enterprise I was delighted to open the economic forum event at RGU in late November which brought together business leaders from across the North-east of Scotland and beyond to stimulate an innovative discussion on the economic future of the Aberdeen city region. The event attracted more than 150 delegates and will support the City Region Deal by engaging local, national and international leaders in working together to help shape a new economic direction for this region.

Swimming stars

Aberdeen students emerged victorious at the Scottish student aquatics competition at the end of November, held in our own Aquatics Centre at the Aberdeen Sports Village. We had several individual event wins, and the overall combined swimming team score put us top of the rankings at the end of the championships. Water polo did particularly well, with our men's team winning silver and our women's team winning bronze.

Congratulations to all our teams for these magnificent team and individual efforts, and yet another confirmation of the strength of competitive sport at Aberdeen and the benefit of our investment in our magnificent facilities.



Festive highlights

Our music events in the run-up to the festive break have been a brilliant reminder of the strength of music at Aberdeen, including the premiere of Paul Mealor's first symphony in St Machar Cathedral, the University Carol Service last week, and the wonderful celebration of Christmas music and readings at St Marylebone Parish Church for our London alumni, friends and supporters, which featured lessons read by luminaries connected to the University including Baronesses Berridge and Linklater, Lord Hodge and Dr Fiona Kennedy.

Christmas Eve is always rather special and this year our campus and community will be part of that magic with BBC Scotland's Christmas Celebration from St Machar's Cathedral. Presenter Sally Magnusson will introduce performers Emily Smith, Robert Lovie, Barbara Dickson, with of course our own Chapel Choir and Chamber Choir, a congregation gathered from the City and University, and readings by staff and students at the University.

And on the 28th, what better reason to collapse in front of the television than a team of our finest alumni competing in a special Christmas University Challenge. The Aberdeen team comprises Richard Klein, Director of Factual Programmes for ITV, Ian Boyd, Chief Scientific Adviser to DEFRA, Nicky Campbell, journalist and TV presenter, and Kezia Dugdale, MSP and Leader of the Scottish Labour Party. I'm confident they will give the opposition and MC Jeremy Paxman a run for their money!

Finally I would like to leave you with a link to another piece which represents both the quality of our students and the hope they represent for the future. Dorota Chapko is one of our PhD students in Public Health and was published early December on the [World Bank website](#), and also on the [World Economic Forum](#) website with over 5,000 views on Facebook.

With very best wishes for a happy festive break to all our Aberdeen family.