



PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

Ian Diamond
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

November 2015

Colleagues

The autumn term is flying by faster than the leaves falling from the trees outside my office. This week we celebrate our winter graduations and as always I am looking forward to seeing our graduates and their families enjoying this very special day which they will remember all their lives. In so doing they will certainly remember the encouragement and hard work by so many of our colleagues that has enabled them to get to this happy day.

Meanwhile very different conversations are taking place north and south of the border with respect to the future of higher education in the UK.

In Westminster, the UK government released its Green Paper on Higher Education. This proposes some changes to the architecture of English Higher Education with the HEFCE and the Office of Fair Access amalgamating into a new Office for Students; a largely metrics based Teaching Excellence Framework linked to the ability to raise fees by RPI; a proposed move of the REF to the Research Councils and a new metrics based mid-REF review to identify emerging areas of research; and the removal of English institutions from Fol.

We await the results of the consultation of

the Green Paper, and will be working through - with other Scottish universities - the implications for us. A key input on research to the Green Paper will be the report of the Review of Research Councils by Sir Paul Nurse, expected before the Chancellor makes his autumn statement on Wednesday.

All these will lead into the discussions about the Scottish Government's budget for Higher Education which will continue alongside the discussions on the Higher Education Governance Bill. All of this makes it a fluid time for higher education policy but, for us, the key thing will be to continue to deliver the very high quality education and research for which we are rightly praised.

One conversation which is certainly not getting enough attention is the contribution Scotland's universities can make to growing the economy. Last year Rob Woodward, CEO of the STV Group and I agreed to co-chair a new Growing Value Scotland (GVS) Task Force, with the aim of exploring ways to connect the natural inventiveness of universities with the innovation needs of companies and the Scottish economy. *(Continues page 2)*



Visitors on campus

With our huge range of engagement across the organisation and my own packed diary it is hard to single out visits of particular significance. One of particular importance to both our internal community and our external profile was the recent visit by Annabelle Ewing, Scottish Minister for Youth and Women's Employment, as part of Living Wage Week. We are proud to be an early adopter of this scheme which was a logical next step in underpinning our commitment to keeping people at the heart of our vision for the University.

Also on campus was Dr Ian Duncan, Member of the European Parliament, who visited our Centre for Innovative Building Materials and Technologies to meet the research team and students working on developing materials for a low energy future - research which has exciting potential for building in extreme climates hot or cold. This was geology graduate Dr Duncan's second visit this year, having been a panel member at the joint University-European Parliament event debating the implications for Scotland, the UK and Europe of the move towards the EC's Energy Union strategy.

I also want to mention the honour I personally felt in welcoming landmine and peace campaigner Jerry White for our annual Carnegie Lecture. I'm sure colleagues who attended will agree that Jerry is an inspirational character and speaker and his work to unite areas of tension throughout the world by bringing together the different faiths is a mission that deserves our support.

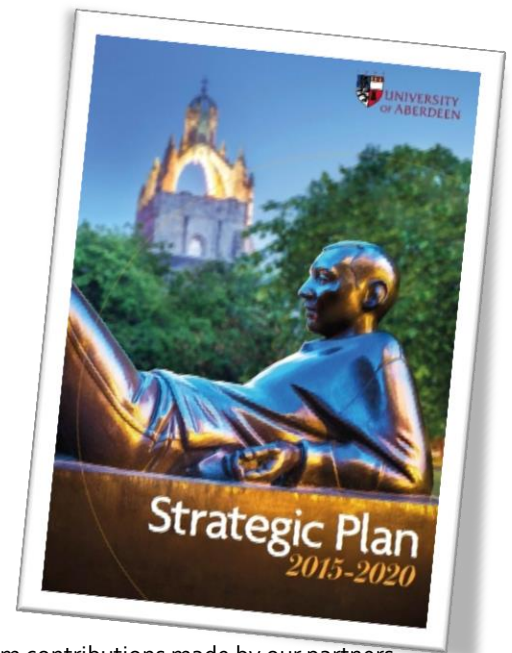
Our work built on a UK-wide inquiry undertaken by the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) into fostering greater business/industry and university collaboration in future.

Our interim report *Growing Value: Business – University Collaboration for the 21st Century* has just been published. One of our key findings is that whilst university-based research spend in Scotland is above the UK average as a percentage of GDP, spending by business in this area lags considerably behind the majority of the UK. In fact only 3% of the total investment in research and development across the UK is derived from businesses in Scotland and we clearly need to understand why this is the case, and how Scotland's industrial base can undertake more R&D. The full report is available on the [GVS webpage](#).

This University is acknowledged for the high impact of its research and our success in commercialising clever ideas; building on this strength is fundamental in our new Strategic Plan. Printed copies are now being distributed across our campuses, and a digital version with videos is now on our [website here](#).

In addition to the year of internal conversations in our community, we also benefited from contributions made by our partners and stakeholders, and I shall be sending the plan to them this week and stressing the value and importance of their continuing engagement in taking our ambitions forward.

Internally many of our most important discussions take place at meetings of Senate, as our main academic body. As part of our recent Senate Effectiveness Review, we engaged with staff and students from across the University to find out how we could enhance the operation of Senate, and one of the outcomes was the [Senate Digest](#), a concise overview for staff following each Senate meeting, the first of which headlined the weekly StaffNet ezine. I enjoy the breadth of discussion at these meetings, and I hope that the *Digest* will be helpful to all the community.



Chinese conversations

Colleagues will be aware of the visit to the UK in late October of Chinese President Xi Jinping, and I was pleased to meet the President at the UK Confucius Institutes and Classrooms Annual Conference at UCL in London, where the President and HRH The Duke of York were guests of honour. Principal Li Xiaohong of Wuhan University was also at the conference, which presented an excellent chance to discuss opportunities for expanding partnership and co-operation between our two universities.

Vice-Principal portfolios

I want to update colleagues on some changes in the portfolios of our vice-principal team to align senior leadership to our strategic priorities. Margaret Ross will combine her role as Head of the College of Arts and Social Sciences with leadership of our 'People' priority, recognising and celebrating our diverse community and placing our people at the heart of everything we do. As previously communicated we are delighted to have Anne Glover on our senior management team, and Anne will employ her invaluable external profile and experience in her new role as Vice-Principal for External Affairs.

Ideas put forward for Sixth Century Forum

I mentioned in my last update the Sixth Century Forum, and how that can provide a platform for conversations leading to new interdisciplinary research. I was delighted to receive proposals from colleagues which I think are well worth taking forward. One from Adam Wyner in Computing Sciences focuses on the role of policy within our society, and proposes bringing together colleagues from a variety of disciplines to look at opportunities for collaboration and funding to take forward policy-related R&D, including computer tools for policy analysis and monitoring, especially in the University's research priority themes.

Another proposal from Andy Welch in Medical Sciences cites the potential to apply medical imaging technology – in which we are acknowledged leaders – to the big questions around climate change and energy security, including developing new imaging methods.

Leadership Academy

In our Strategic Plan we describe our university as a space to empower our student community to thrive, teach students independence and responsibility of thought and action, and help them to grow as active citizens, with the leadership skills for success in their future life course. This is exactly the aim of the Leadership Academy being led by AUSA President for Societies and Student Activities, Veronika Hofmann for student leaders involved in running activity groups within AUSA (societies, sports clubs, student media) to support and develop them in their leadership role. The Academy puts on high-quality workshops and invites experts from across the UK to talk on enhancing and improving skills set to help participants 'become the leaders they aspire to be'. I think this is an excellent addition to the student experience at Aberdeen and commend Veronika and the team for their work.

Making it happen'

The University was well represented at the annual Universities Scotland reception at the Scottish Parliament on 10 November. The reception, '*Making it happen*', highlighted the role the HE sector plays in making Scotland a world-leading entrepreneurial and enterprising nation by supporting and developing both staff and students. Jeremy Kilburn and other colleagues showcased ABventure Zone and its programmes - with Aberdeen receiving further recognition through two case studies, EuroBiotix CIC and Saccade Diagnostics, being profiled by Universities Scotland. Colleagues can learn more by downloading the '[Making it happen](#)' brochure [here](#).



International recognition for colleagues

Three awards over recent weeks are a great illustration of the recognition of our researchers in international centres of learning. David Macdonald of our School of Geosciences was awarded an Honorary Professorship at Perm National Research Polytechnic University (PNRPU) in Russia, a major centre for oil exploration and production. David received the honour while delivering a masterclass in petroleum exploration to final year undergraduate students at Perm university, where he has taught since 2012.

During the 50th birthday celebrations of Umeå University in Sweden, Stefan Brink of our Centre for Scandinavian Studies was awarded the 'Language and Culture Trust's Prize' for 2015. Stefan was honoured for his wide-ranging and inter-disciplinary research in political and social structures in early Scandinavia and received the prize from Vice-Chancellor Professor Lena Gustafsson, in the presence of His Majesty, King Carl XVI Gustaf.

Meanwhile Professor John Wallace who leads the gut health theme at the Rowett Institute became the first non-Italian to receive the annual Invernizzi award at Expo in Milan. The Invernizzi Foundation promotes research in economics, biology and food science through grants, conferences awards and scholarships.

Celebrating excellence in teaching...

I was delighted to host the special event earlier this month to celebrate colleagues who have newly achieved the Postgraduate Certificate in either Learning & Teaching, Academic Practice or Medical Education. Three staff were also recognised for their scholarly pursuit in achieving a Postgraduate Diploma in Medical Education. This suite of programmes is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and on successful completion participants are eligible to become Fellows of the HEA. Joy Perkins, Educational & Employability Development Adviser is the contact for more information.

...and in supporting our students

It was also a huge pleasure in my capacity as Deputy Lord-Lieutenant to present our colleague Iris Paterson with her British Empire Medal at the Aberdeen City Town House. Known to generations of University of Aberdeen students as simply Mrs P, she has served the student community for over 50 years, and still works as part of the support team at The Hub. Last summer Mrs P received a long-service award at the summer graduations from our Chancellor, HRH The Duchess of Rothesay.

Sports Village success

I'm delighted to welcome Duncan Sinclair as new Chief Executive of Aberdeen Sports Village. With more than 30 years experience working in the sports industry, latterly as Operations Director of Sport Aberdeen, Duncan brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to his new role in leading the strategic direction of Aberdeen Sports Village and I look forward to working with Duncan in further developing this tremendous asset for the University and the City. (*Continues...*)

I also want to congratulate all those involved in successfully securing the LEN European Junior Swimming Championships for the Aberdeen Aquatics Centre in 2020. This award is testament to the international standard of Aberdeen Sports Village. The Aquatics Centre was deliberately designed – and supported by generous donors - to attract international competition at this level, in addition to proving very popular with our students and the wider community.

Thank you to our donors

We continue to receive generous donations to our Development Trust thanks to our family of alumni, friends and benefactors across the globe supporting the University's ambitions across all Colleges. Recently this has included a Jim Duncan Scholarship being awarded to an engineering student from Ghana, funding for a PhD economics student to attend an international summer school in Belgium, funding for an opera production by a PhD music student and support for an acute leukaemia research project.

I look forward also to progressing extremely positive conversations with the Kirby Laing Foundation regarding developments in their support for Divinity studies at Aberdeen.

Autumn events

Autumn brings a packed programme in our event calendar, spanning the widest definition of culture, curiosity and learning, with, of course, wonderful music including the carol concert for London-based members of the Aberdeen family, the BBC Scotland Christmas Eve carol service to be filmed at St Machar Cathedral, the wonderful venue that hosted Paul Mealor's new symphony last Thursday.

Our public engagement team has coordinated 35 events in November alone, many showcasing the strength of our arts and humanities research through the Festival of Social Science closely followed by the Being Human Festival. The University is the only Scottish hub for both these festivals which attracted over 1,000 people to venues across the city. A thousand people also enjoyed a special weekend and evening series of events at Aberdeen Science Centre in partnership with the University, crowning a year-long celebration for pioneering scientist James Clerk Maxwell and the 2015 International Year of Light.

We also held our poignant annual Remembrance service and parade of cadets, remembering the many members of the University community who lost their lives in conflicts distant and near, and this week we look forward to our student-led Interfaith celebration of the diversity of our campus community: a family of many faiths united in the very special Aberdeen experience.

With the growing success and impact of our public and cultural programmes, it is timely to remind colleagues that the Call for Ideas for our 2016 May Festival is currently live and I'd encourage staff and students with ideas for events to contact our public engagement team.

And finally...it's fitting as we celebrate the importance of social sciences in our world today that we congratulate Anthropology PhD student Gioia Barnbrook whose article on 'a rapidly changing climate and a renewed social science' was runner-up in the ESRC 'The World in 2065' writing competition. The competition, in collaboration with SAGE, marked the 50th anniversary of both organisations by inviting ESRC-funded PhD students from across the UK to put their creative skills to task and look at what impact the social sciences and current research will have in 2065. Gioia's success and £500 prize was announced last week at the House of Commons ceremony.

I encourage colleagues to read her thought-provoking piece, published in [The Guardian](#).

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