

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2007

Present: Professors Logan, Houlihan, Ms C Macaslan, Professors Haites, Rodger, MacGregor, Ms M Pearson, Professors Ditch, Hughes, Secombes, Imrie, MacDonald, Cotter, Walkden, Robinson, Long, Burgess, Ms C Banks, Mr A Arthur, Dr WD McCausland, Dr B Marsden, Dr J Schaper, Dr J Forbes, Mrs G Kirkpatrick, Mrs A Valyo, Dr S Lawrie, Professor Saunders, Mrs ML Ross, Mr SC Styles, Dr A Arnason, Dr AD King, Dr P Fraser, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Young, Dr I Greig, Dr D Scott, Dr M Boroujerdi, Dr J Cleland, Professors Heys, Liversidge, Dr T MacFarlane, Dr ER van Teijlingen, Professor Webster, Dr LJ Philip, Dr WTA Harrison, Professor Levi, Dr J Skakle, Dr SP Townsend, Miss A Fraser, Mr J Hardey, Mr D Bernard, Mr O Lash-Williams, Mr J O'Neil, Miss S Dicks, Miss K Ross, Miss L Bruce, Mr S Qureshi and Ms S Sithamparanathan.

Apologies: Principal, Professors Gane, Frost, Fynsk, Salmon, Duff, Dr P Edwards, Mr MJ Radford, Mrs L Stephen, Dr DC Hendry, Dr D Molyneaux, Dr P Mealor, Professors Lurie, N'Dow, Dr A Schofield, Dr HM Wallace, Dr P Benson, Dr S Bagaeen, and Dr N Spedding.

The Senior Vice-Principal, in opening the meeting, gave the Principal's apologies as he was out of the country on University business.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2007 were approved.

THE YEAR AHEAD: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

- 2.1 The Senior Vice-Principal gave a short presentation to the Senate setting out the year ahead. In his presentation, he highlighted the following main points:

- The Strategic Plan was now available on the University website. Work was currently ongoing to produce an operational plan which would support delivery of the objectives of the Plan.
- The University was now ranked 137th in the Times Higher World League Tables. This was a considerable achievement with the University having risen 58 places. This ranking served as further affirmation of the University's upward progress towards the goal, as set out in the Strategic Plan, to be one of the top 100 universities in the world.
- In regard to teaching, the Curriculum Reform project would be the main focus. Work was also progressing in regard to recruitment and retention but there remained challenges. The outcome of the National Student Survey had also been encouraging.
- In regard to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the submission had been sent off. Work would now focus on developing strategies to manage future research. In the future it was likely that Knowledge Transfer activities and Pooling Initiatives would be seen as increasingly important by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).
- In terms of infrastructure, the ten year cash flow plan set out £230m of investment. Projects include the Matthew Hay Project, the new Regional Sports Centre, the new Library and enhancements to the Student Village at Hillhead.
- A number of external drivers would influence the way in which the University moves forward. The Scottish Executive's Spending Review was being announced. This would set out the Scottish Government's spending priorities for the coming three years. The Teaching Funding Review would also report by the end of the year. The Scottish Executive's Skills Strategy would also set out challenges in regard to future economic development.
- The metrics-driven basis for future research assessment for the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Medicine) subjects would pose new challenges.
- In the next round of Strategic Research Development Grants (SRDGs), the SFC was keen to encourage work on policy related issues to inform policy makers in government.

- In terms of new developments, the merger with the Rowett Research Institute was progressing well with a target of Spring 2008. Discussions were also ongoing in regard to the establishment of a Dental School on the Foresterhill site. This was being driven by the Scottish Government and was being taken forward in partnership with the University of Dundee.
 - In terms of staffing, the University continues to look for recruitment opportunities for new academic staff. Plans were also being put in place to bring forward opportunities for early retirement and voluntary severance.
 - Work was ongoing in regard to a number of environmental issues (e.g. transport, buildings). These would be brought to the Senate over the coming year.
- 2.2 In the discussion following the presentation, one member queried whether the Library development was still dependent on the University securing a degree of external funding. In response, it was confirmed that a fundraising target of £30m had been set for the Library Project with £10m of cash and £5m of pledges projected to be achieved before commencement.

THE CURRICULUM REFORM: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

- 3.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) gave a short presentation setting out the background to the Curriculum Reform. In her presentation, she outlined the remit and composition of the various groups which had been formed to take forward the Curriculum Reform debate. In addition to these, she reminded the Senate that it was important that the whole university community was able to contribute to this debate. In this regard, she illustrated the range of ways by which staff and students would be able to participate.
- 3.2 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:-
- A member of the Senate queried whether the implementation period was realistic. In response, it was stated that whilst implementation would start in the third year of the project, such implementation would be likely to be phased over a number of years.
 - The implications of the Curriculum Reform for individual disciplines were queried. In some professional subjects, it was noted that there may be limited opportunity for curricular change. In response, it was noted that there is no intention to make proposals for the discipline content of individual programmes, however, the outcome of the Curriculum Reform debate may cause disciplines to reflect on their curricula.
 - The resource implications of the Reform were queried. It was stressed that any new structure would need to be properly resourced in order to succeed. It would also be important to ensure that the appropriate management structures are in place to support any change.

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE (RAE 2008) PLANNING REPORT

- 4.1 The Vice-Principal (Research and Commercialisation) presented an update on the Research Assessment Exercise (copy filed with the Principal copy of the minutes). In presenting his report, the Vice-Principal paid tribute to the hard work and dedication of staff who had supported this exercise. He informed the Senate that 580 fte staff had been included in the University's submission. Looking to the future, he reminded the Senate that the new metrics driven approach would pose new challenges for the STEM areas.
- 4.2 In discussion, the following points were noted:-
- The RAE was perceived by one member of Senate to have been damaging in regard to teaching and learning. It would be important to ensure in the Curriculum Reform that research excellence is used to fully inform teaching.
 - The move from the existing RAE to a more rolling process of research assessment may reduce the opportunities for periods of reflection. In response it was agreed that this was an important point. It was, however, noted that it was hoped that the new process would be light touch.

ADMISSIONS REPORT

- 5.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) in presenting the Admissions Report (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes), informed the Senate that the University had for the first time admitted over 3000 full-time first degree and PGDE students. She thanked all those who had contributed to this achievement. She, however, informed the Senate that despite this achievement there remained challenges especially in regard to science recruitment. She further informed the Senate that in the 2008 cycle the number of initial choices permitted by UCAS would be reduced from 6 to 5. This would mean that it would be increasingly important to ensure to maximise the number making Aberdeen their first choice and also to enhance the conversion of applications.
- 5.2 In discussion, one member of Senate asked in the light of the recent accommodation difficulties, that consideration be given to ensuring that future admissions targets were linked to consideration of student accommodation requirements. In response, it was stated that this year's problems had, in part, been due to an acute shortage of accommodation in the city. Of those who had been housed in temporary accommodation only a small number remained. Looking to the future, there would be an additional 520 beds at the Hillhead site from September 2008. In addition, the changing demographics of the student population would mean that it may be necessary to consider offering a wider range of mixed mode and budget-style accommodation. It was also noted that the practice of housing students from overseas in Council accommodation was far from ideal and that further consideration was being given to this and developing university accommodation for all married students.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY AND UNISTATS DATA

- 6.1 In presenting the report on the National Student Survey (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) drew members attention to the main aspects of the report. She informed the Senate that the University had been ranked in 16th place in the UK in terms of outcome with an overall satisfaction of 88%. It was noted that the University received the lowest positive response in the areas of assessment and feedback. She informed the Senate that a more detailed breakdown of the data by discipline would be made available on the Senate website. The University would be participating in the Survey again in 2008.
- 6.2 In discussion, one member queried whether, in view of the University's success in the survey, the University should be seeking to 'review' rather than 'reform' its curriculum. In response, it was agreed that the aspects of good practice within the existing curriculum should be recognised within the Curriculum Reform process. It was further noted that, as the survey sought the views of the final year students only, it does not recognise the views of students who have dropped out in the course of their studies.

ENHANCING ACADEMIC AND PASTORAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

- 7.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) introduced the paper on 'Enhancing Academic and Pastoral Support for Students' (copy filed with the Principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, she reminded members that there were already a wide range of support mechanisms for students, however, these were more effective in some areas (e.g. professionally accredited degrees) than they were in others. In inviting discussion of the issues set out in the paper, she informed the Senate that issues raised would be used to inform the further enhancement of academic and pastoral support for students that would be taken forward by a Working Group of the Senate.
- 7.2 In discussion, the following main points were noted:
- Many advisers already provide both an academic and pastoral role. It may be difficult to separate academic issues from those of a more pastoral nature as they tend to be inter-linked.
 - If all staff were to be asked to be personal tutors, this may lead to a variable experience for students as some staff may be less suited to carrying out this role than others.
 - Students get a variable experience at present with the existing advising system with some Advisers providing a better service than others.
 - While the normal full-time advising load is 40 students, many advisers have a significantly higher load. In addition, Heads of School need to have a more direct line-management role in regard to the advising system.
 - There will remain a need for professional support services (e.g. Counselling Service).

- Female members of staff often provide a degree of pastoral support to students.
- It would be easier to resource the advising system if it was spread amongst a greater number of staff
- Students would prefer to build a relationship with one member of staff rather than having to get to know both an Adviser and a Regent/Personal Tutor.
- There will be resource implications if an enhanced support system is introduced.
- The support needs of Taught Postgraduate students also require consideration.
- Support is a two-way process. Students need to recognise when they require support and accept the opportunities offered.
- Some students don't perceive the value of the advising system.
- The School activities organised this year as part of the induction activities did not work well in all areas. Some student feel a greater association with a Discipline than a School. In other areas School-based activities were very successful.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

1. Role of the Rector on Court: Draft Ordinance

- 8.1 The Senate, for its part, approved the draft Ordinance which Court had moved to take forward a change to the position of the Office of Rector as automatic Chair of Court.

2. Information Strategy Committee

- 8.2 The Senate for its part, approved a recommendation from the Information Strategy Committee to amend its composition to include the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching and the Vice-Principal for Research and Commercialisation as members of the Committee.
- 8.3 The Senate noted that the recommendation reflected the developing role of the Committee with regard to institution-wide issues requiring a strategic overview.

3. Progress of Ordinance No 138 [Amendments to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus]

- 8.4 The Senate noted that the Court had noted that Draft Ordinance No 138 [Amendments to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus] approved by Court on 20 March 2007 had been approved by the Privy Council.

4. Progress of Draft Resolution No 251 of 2007 [Amendments to Regulations for Postgraduate Study]

- 8.5 The Senate noted that the Court had approved, on the recommendation of the Senate, Resolution No 251 of 2007 [*Amendments to Regulations for Postgraduate Study*] without forwarding it to the Business Committee of the General Council and generally making it available, as provided for, exceptionally, by Section 6 (2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, so that the amended provisions might be applied with effect from 15 September 2007.

5. Progress of Draft Resolution No 252 of 2007 [Seventh Amendment to Schedule A to University Court Ordinance 111 (Election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus)]

- 8.6 The Senate noted that the Court had approved, on the recommendation of the Senate, Resolution No 252 of 2007 [*Seventh Amendment to Schedule A to University Court Ordinance 111 (Election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus)*] without forwarding it to the Business Committee of the General Council and generally making it available, as provided for, exceptionally, by Section 6 (2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, so that the amended provisions might be applied with immediate effect.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Term Dates

- 9.1 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had approved the Dates of Term for 2008-2009, and provisionally those for the sessions to 2017-2018.

2. Exam Deadlines

- 9.2 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had approved the latest dates for the return of examination results for session 2007/08.

3. Deadline for Class Certificate refusal

- 9.3 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had approved the recommendation that the deadlines for notification to the Registry of the refusal of Class Certificates, to those students previously reported as "at risk" under the Student Monitoring Scheme, be as follows:

First half-session courses:
(other than those below) 5.00 p.m. on 18 December 2007, i.e. on the Tuesday following the last day of teaching

Second half-session courses:
(other than those below) 5.00 p.m. on 13 May 2008, i.e. on the Tuesday following the last day of teaching

MBCbB programme 5.00 p.m. on the Tuesday following the last day of teaching i.e.:

Phase II (2M)	3 June 2008
Phase II (3M)	26 February 2008
Phase III	3 June 2008
Phase IV	10 June 2008

4. Graduation Dates

- 9.4 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had noted the dates and allocation for the November ceremonies as summarised below, approved by the Convener of the UCTL during the summer:

Friday 23 November at 11 a.m. - Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Biological Sciences, Medical Sciences, Medicine, Psychology and Social Sciences

Friday 23 November at 3 p.m. - Higher and First Degrees in the Business School and the Schools of Education and Language and Literature.

Saturday 24 November at 11 a.m. - Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Divinity, History and Philosophy, Engineering, Geosciences, Law and Natural and Computing Sciences.

5. Guidance Note for Students

- 9.5 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had approved amendments to the *Guidance Notes for Students in Relation to (a) Non-Progression on Academic Grounds; (b) Discontinuation of Attendance on Courses on Academic Grounds; (c) Termination of Studies or Candidature for an Award on Academic Grounds* to require that medical and/or personal extenuating circumstances must have been previously notified to the school(s) concerned if they are to be included in consideration of any representation.

6. Annual Institutional Statement on Internal Review Activity: 2006-2007

- 9.6 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had noted the Annual Institutional Statement on Internal Review Activity: 2006-2007, submitted to the Scottish Funding Council in October 2007.

LEARNING AND TEACHING FRAMEWORK

10. The Senate approved the Learning and Teaching Framework and the accompanying Operational Plan (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

REPORTS FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES

11. The Senate noted the changes to the list of courses and programmes approved by the Academic Standards Committees at their recent meetings, available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/report/>

ELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS TO THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS AND ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSORS TO COURT

12. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had approved the timetable for the election of non-*ex officio* members to existing vacancies on the Senatus Academicus and election of Senate Assessors to the Court and JPFEAC (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

13. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the following appointments to University committees with immediate effect, on the recommendation of the relevant Heads of College, where appropriate:-
- To the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee, Professor J Schaper *vice* Professor F Watson and Dr P Davidson *vice* Dr W Deans.
 - To the Senate Postgraduate Academic Appeals Committee, Professor Webster *vice* Professor F Watson and Mrs R Fitzpatrick *vice* Mrs J Forbes.
 - To the Committee on Equality and Diversity, Professor J Prosser and W Naphy and Dr S Townsend.
 - To the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, Dr M Hole, Mr D Lessels and Dr G McEwan as the nominees from the three College Teaching & Learning Committees; Dr P Schlicke and Mrs L Stephen as the nominees from the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate); and Dr D Hay as the nominee from the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate).

CURRICULUM REFORM – SENATE NOMINEES

14. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had nominated Professors Anderson and Schaper to serve as the Senate nominees on the Curriculum Reform Commission. One further Senate nominee to the Commission had yet to be appointed. Professors Anderson and Schaper would also serve as Senate nominees on Curriculum Reform Steering Group.

ORDINANCE 138 (AMENDMENT TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS)

15. The Senate noted that the Privy Council, on 25 July 2007, had approved Ordinance 138 which set out revisions to the composition of the Senate made following the Senate Effectiveness Review. The amendments to the Senate would take immediate effect and accordingly all Established Chair-holders are no longer *ex officio* members of the Senate.

POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT ADMISSIONS – REFERENCE REQUIREMENTS

- 16.1 The Senate noted that the Principal, on behalf of the Senate, had approved during the summer a request from the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee that for a trial period of one year the requirement for references from taught postgraduate applicants be amended as follows:
- No references to be required from applicants where their completed degree had been completed at a UK institution. The exception to this being MRes applicants in the College of Life Sciences & Medicine; they would be required to submit two references.

- Applicants at a UK institution who still have to complete their degree would be required to submit one reference.
- All other PGT applicants would be required to submit one reference.

16.2 The revised procedure would apply for January and September 2008 applicants and would be reviewed in October 2008. The proposals were discussed at the Postgraduate Strategy Advisory Group and had the endorsement of all three Colleges.

AWARD OF ENDOWED PRIZES AND MEDALS 2006-07

17. The Senate noted that the List of the Award of University Prizes and Medals for the session 2006-07 was available at www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/prizes.ht

CONSULTATION: REPORT OF THE JOINT QUALITY REVIEW GROUP

18. The Senate noted the draft institutional response to the Scottish Funding Council's consultation in regard to the report from the Joint Quality Review Group available at:
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_consultations/sfc/2007/sfc0407c/sfc0407c.htm

GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA*

19.1 The Senate noted that details of those qualified to receive degrees, diplomas and other awards who have applied to have them conferred *in absentia* could be viewed in the Registry (see appendix to Minutes of June 2008).

19.2 The Senate agreed to confer the degrees on, and award the diplomas and other qualifications to the persons stated.