

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2011

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Houlihan, McGeorge, MacGregor, Morgan, Haites, Rodger, Gane, Ross, Dr P Ziegler, Professors Crotty, Secombes, O'Donoghue, Dr J Morrison, Professor Naphy, Dr B Connelly, Professor P Edwards, Dr M Ehrenschtendner, Dr D C Hendry, Dr K Shennan, Professor W F Long, Ms C Banks, Mr A Arthur, Professor Hutchison, Dr J Lamb, Dr W D McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr M Brown, Dr T Weber, Dr D Robson, Dr D J Smith, Dr M Durham, Dr J Stewart, Dr A Pillai, Professor Duff, Dr C W Haerper, Dr A D King, Dr L Hastie, Dr A Carrington, Dr A Jack, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Greig, Dr D Scott, Dr N Vargesson, Ms K Harrild, Dr S Semple, Dr P Benson, Dr D Martin, Dr S Duthie, Professors Chandler, Guz, Dr D Jolley, Dr L Philip, Dr M Reed, Dr R Wells, Professor C Grebogi, Dr G Coghill, Professor Fynsk, Mr R Parker, Miss M McHaney, Mr M Napier, Mr A Gilinsky, Mr S Jackson, Mr A Hermann and Miss J Batty

Apologies: Professors Stollery, Ingold, Black, McCaig, McRae, Greaves, Pym, Soulsby, Cotter, Walkden, Wallace, Grant, Nelson, Dr J Geddes, Mrs L Clark, Mr MJ Radford, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr D Hay, Dr B Marsden, Dr R O'Connor, Mr D C McMurtry, Dr P Mealor, Mr C Munro, Professor Syrotinski, Dr T Wills, Dr T Burns, Mr S Styles, Dr P Bernhagen, Mr N Curtis, Dr R Vij, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr X Labin, Professor Robinson, Dr M Young, Dr J Pettit, Dr I Stansfield, Dr J Clelland, Dr A Denison, Professor C de Bari, Professor Heys, Dr L P Erwig, Dr S Fielding, Dr J Francis, Dr H Galley, Professor Rogers, Dr G Shirriffs, Professor Smith, Dr H Wallace, Professor J Newton, Dr R Bull, Dr D Pearson, Dr L Williams, Dr T Thevar Professors Watson, Dobney, Dr T Mighall, Dr T J F Norman, Dr J Skakle, Professors Robinson, Webster, Miss L Sivula, Miss K Kaushik, Miss J Paton, Mr D McCroskie, Miss C Parashiuescu, Mr A Dean, Mr J Montiero, Mr R Samii, Miss L Bruce and Mr E Pereira

In opening the meeting, the Principal thanked those members attending their last meeting for their contributions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 41.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2011. One member questioned whether the Framework for Academic Excellence would be brought back to Senate again for further discussion. In response, it was noted that Senate had been given the opportunity to comment on the proposals and that it was not intended that they be brought back for further consideration at this stage. Following this clarification, the Senate approved the minutes.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

- 42.1 The Principal updated the Senate in regard to the developments in terms of funding for HE in Scotland following the election of the SNP Government in May. He informed the Senate that he anticipated that the level of the Research Excellence Grant would be maintained at the current level but that there may be a move only to fund 3* and 4*. In regard to tuition fees, the SNP were committed to maintaining no fees for Scottish students. He informed the Senate that the SNP had committed to meet any funding gap and to support the international competitiveness of the Scottish HE sector. In that regard, he informed the Senate that it would be important for the HE sector to work closely with the Scottish Government to ensure the ongoing success of the Scottish universities. He further informed the Senate that it would also be important for the University to engage actively with the Research Councils in regard to research funding. He stressed also that the University needs to develop further its international opportunities and informed the Senate that the Vice Principal (External Affairs)

together with Professor Grebogi had recently visited Brazil as part of a delegation with the Deputy Prime Minister. He further informed the Senate that the Vice Principal (Internationalisation) was considering opportunities in Europe. He informed the Senate that Professor Claire Wallace and Professor Phil Hannaford had been appointed to the posts of Vice Principal (Research Strategy and Research Funding respectively). Professor Wallace would have a focus on research funding whilst Professor Hannaford would be focusing on the REF. He drew his statement to a close by thanking the Senate and the wider University for their contributions to the Strategic Plan which had received positive feedback from Alumni.

- 42.2 The Principal sought comment from the Senate. No questions were raised. On a separate matter, one member queried appropriateness of the wording used in the biographical information provided for one of the Honorary degree candidates. In response it was noted that the wording used was not representative of the University's position and care would be taken to ensure that this wording was not used in any documentation going forward.

MOTION FROM THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

- 43.1 The Principal informed the Senate that the Students' Association (SA) had submitted a motion proposed by the President of the SA and seconded by the President for Education & Employability for consideration by the Senate as outlined below:

“The Senate declares that it has no confidence in the policies of the UK Minister for Higher Education, on the grounds that the policies and the haste and disorder with which they have been introduced will have in the long-term a significant adverse effect on the discharge of the University's Teaching and Research activities. The Senate requests that the Chair write on its behalf to the Government in order to communicate the Senate's position on the aforementioned.”

- 43.2 He invited the President of the SA to present this motion to the Senate. In doing so, the President of the SA informed the Senate that the Students' Association took the view that the policy decisions being taken by the Minister for Universities and Science were not based on any coherent principles. While noting that the funding decisions being taken in Westminster would not have a direct impact on the situation in Scotland, he drew the Senate's attention to the fact that many English students study in Aberdeen and that more generally the funding decisions taken in England would impact north of the border through the Barnett formula. He finally stressed that members of the university community across the country should have the opportunity to show support to their colleagues in England. The President for Education & Employability endorsed the comments made by the President of the SA and urged the Senate to vote in favour of the motion.

- 43.3 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are detailed below:

- One member commented that while he accepted the reasoning put forward, it was difficult to see how the action proposed would have any impact and for that reason did not feel it should be supported.
- Speaking in support of the motion, one member commented that as the situation with funding for HE reaches a crisis situation it is increasingly the case that the increasing resource gap having a significant impact on the ability to get the job done. Given Senate's role to ensure the academic integrity of the University, he urged members to support the motion.
- One member, speaking in support, stated that it was right in a democracy to be able to challenge the Government in regard to such policy decisions.
- One member queried whether English universities had been similarly asked to take such action. In response it was noted that some English universities had done this but the University had not been asked by any English university to support this action.
- One member questioned whether the actions proposed by the Government would have a significant impact on research funding. He commented that the UK was second only to

the US in regard to research funding and that the funding going forward through the Research Councils maintained at current levels. He stressed that he did not sense any long term concern in regard to the health of research funding.

- One member commented that given the recent election of an SNP Government in Scotland it would seem inappropriate for a Scottish university to be getting involved in English politics. If it was felt action was required, it would be better to direct this at the Scottish Government. In supporting this comment, another member stated that in many ways the Scottish position was less clear than that in England.
- One member commented that it would be important to consider the efficacy of supporting the motion given the devolved status in Scotland. He questioned whether one country should be telling another what to do when the same opportunity is not available in reverse.

43.4 The President of the Students' Association in responding to the comments made stressed that the decisions being taken in England would have an impact on the accessibility of Scottish HE to those in England and vice versa. This he was proposed could lead to a two tier society. He further proposed in the light of the comments made about research funding that the reference to this be removed from the motion. He further stressed his view that there was a lack of coherence in the thinking and that the promised White Paper had not yet been produced.

43.5 The Principal invited the Senate to then vote upon the motion. Before doing so, he asked the President of the SA if he wished to propose his amendment to remove reference to research funding. The President confirmed he wished to do this and this was supported by the President for Education & Employability. The Senate then voted on the amended motion. The outcome being 17 votes for, 46 votes against and 5 abstentions. The motion was therefore not carried.

UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

44.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) presented the Update on the Curriculum Reform (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, he informed the Senate that the Sixth Century Courses offered in the second half-session had been well received by students and that there had been very positive feedback from External Examiners. All new entrants were being surveyed in regard to their likely choice of Enhanced Study options. He drew the Senate's attention to the proposed principles for Enhanced Study at levels 3 and above and reminded the Senate that it was the normal expectation that a student would take 30 credits of Enhanced Study across levels 3 and 4 combined. He informed the Senate that there had been some debate about how this Enhanced Study might be provided at levels 3 and 4. In particular, there had been discussion about whether or not such courses should have pre-requisites or whether it might be possible to open up such courses to students within a set of cognate disciplines. He informed the Senate that it was the view that Enhanced Study courses taken at levels 3 and 4 should count towards final degree classification given the importance placed on Enhanced Study by the Curriculum Reform commission. In this regard, he noted that one possible exception to this might be required should a student be in a situation where they require to complete their Sustained Study programme in their 3rd or 4th year. Such a situation could occur but would be the exception. In regard to the definition of Discipline Breadth, he noted that a minor modification would be required to reflect the different nature of Discipline Breadth courses at levels 3 and above. Such a modification would be proposed as part of the regulatory changes for 2012/13. In regard to Sixth Century Courses at levels 3 and 4, he informed the Senate that it was hoped that it might be possible to align some of these with the Research Themes as set out in the Strategic Plan though such an approach would not preclude others being proposed. A call was currently out for proposals. In drawing to a close, he informed the Senate that it had been agreed that with effect from 2011/12, the work of the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board would be subsumed within the remit of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL). The Enhanced Study Group would continue as a sub-group of the UCTL for the time being.

44.2 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- One member queried the difference between Enhanced Study and Honours options at levels 3 and 4. In response, it was noted that Sixth Century Courses at levels 3 and 4 would be different in nature from Honours options due to the requirement for these to be interdisciplinary in nature. Furthermore, students in levels 3 and 4 who are qualified to take a course outwith their discipline would be able to do so and this would count towards final degree classification. It was further noted that the proposed approach sought to accommodate the challenges posed by different disciplines and the needs of accrediting bodies.
- One member queried how a student could be taking Sustained Study in their 3rd or 4th year (e.g. where they don't commence their Sustained Study programme until 2nd year). In response, it was noted that it was unlikely but technically possible that a student could be in a position where they need to complete their Sustained Study programme in level 3 or 4. Enhanced Study provision in 3rd and 4th year would however normally be focused on either Sixth Century Courses or Disciplinary Breadth.
- One member questioned what would be the position in regard to Enhanced Study in a one year Honours programme. In response, it was noted that only one School offers one year honours programmes and in such a situation any Enhanced Study taken in 3rd year would not count towards final degree classification.
- One member commented that some programmes already include elements of disciplinary breadth and that this should also be considered as a way to achieve the Enhanced Study requirements. It was further stressed by another Senator that the important thing is for students to have an increased opportunity to take a broader range of courses and that the element of student choice should be maintained.

ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT

45.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) presented the paper on Enhancing Student Support (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). He informed the Senate that the increasing diversity of the student population and the changing expectations of students was meaning that there was an increased need to ensure that a strong system of student support is provided for all students. In doing so, he stressed it would be important to provide students with a network of support contacts who they could go to for help. In this regard, he outlined to the Senate outline proposals for two strands of support which he proposed be taken forward for further development and implementation. These were:

- (i) A personal tutor system
He informed the Senate that the working title of Personal Tutor reflected the changing balance from academic to pastoral advice needs of students. A short-lived working group of UCTL was being established to bring back more detailed proposals to a future meeting of the Senate. He informed the Senate that it was proposed that this new role be supported by enhanced training and also IT systems to aid in curriculum advice. At present the University has a range of advising systems and it was felt that it would be better to operate a system across the University where a student had the same tutor across their full degree programme.
- (ii) A peer-mentoring system.
He informed the Senate that such systems had been shown to operate effectively at other institutions. It was proposed that a transitional peer-mentoring system be introduced to help integrate new students into the University. A pilot was being conducted in the School of Medical Sciences with a view to its wider roll-out from September 2012.

45.2 There followed a short discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- One member, in supporting the proposals, queried how peer mentors might be selected. In particular, he questioned whether there would be any issues in regard to disclosure. In response, it was noted that it was planned to interview prospective mentors and that clear guidance would be provided in regard to how meetings between mentor and mentees should be conducted. The issue of checks in regard to Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) was also under consideration. All mentors would also receive training before taking up their role.
- One member questioned the proposal that 'as far as possible all academic staff should be a personal tutor' and queried how practicable such an approach would be given workload constraints and not all staff being suited to that type of role.
- One member, in supporting the proposals, commented that the change to 'personal tutor' would be appropriate and gave support to the move to make this a role normally undertaken by all academic staff. In regard to the peer mentoring proposals, it was queried whether an opportunity to have a peer mentor would also be made available to incoming PgT students. In response, it was noted that the initial pilot was focusing on undergraduate entrants but that did not exclude the scheme being rolled out to PgT students in due course although the scope for who might act as mentor for such students was more limited.
- In regard to staff taking on the role of personal tutor, one member commented that with the training and IT support proposed, the issue of whether staff would be willing to do the role should come down to whether or not they are interested in interacting with and helping students. If assignment of personal tutor to student was done on a discipline basis that should further encourage engagement with the process.
- One member queried the statement in the proposal that personal tutors would 'have responsibility for curriculum approval for non-Honours (years 1 and 2)' with 'Schools being responsible for managing Honours year curriculum choices'. In response, it was noted that in many programmes, students have little or no curriculum choice in Honours and as such this could be dealt with administratively leaving more time for more valuable engagements between personal tutor and student.
- One member queried who would be liable should a peer mentor give wrong advice. In response it was noted that the peer mentors would receive comprehensive training and would be active a largely guidance and sign-posting role.
- One member queried whether Erasmus students would provide the same level of support. While it was noted in response that this had not been discussed, it was agreed that they should be offered the same level of support as any mainstream student.
- Support was expressed for the increased pastoral support role proposed for personal tutors. Such support was critical in regard to enhancing student retention. It was further proposed that the models of peer mentor and personal tutor should be extended to include PgT students too.

INSTITUTIONAL SCHEDULE FOR REF 2014 PREPARATIONS

46.1 The Vice-Principal (Research & Commercialisation) presented the paper on the Institutional Schedule for REF 2014 preparations (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, he drew attention to the key dates of 1 July 2011 for submission of impact case studies and 1 October 2011 for the draft reporting for the institutional review of research outputs. The latter would be a dry-run two years prior to the REF submission. He informed the Senate that a consultation on REF 2014 would be issued in July with the final rules being issued in early January 2012.

46.2 There followed a brief discussion in which it was queried how interdisciplinary research narratives might be assessed. In response, it was noted that the guidance was that there should not be cross-reference between panels and therefore a specific unit of assessment must be agreed. If necessary, guidance would be sought from the Research Councils.

- 46.3 In drawing the discussion to a close, the Principal asked the Senate to cascade the information about REF preparations to their colleagues.

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 18 May 2011, as under:

1. Amendments to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic)

- 47.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Draft Amendments to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline as detailed in the draft Resolution (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes) and agreed to forward these to the University Court for approval. The Senate agreed to ask the University Court to pass the draft Resolution forthwith in accordance with the provisions of Section 6 (2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

2. Higher Education Achievement Record

- 47.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning, the proposed template for the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) and also the proposed timing for the introduction of the inclusion of all CAS marks (not just pass marks) on the transcript or HEAR (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

3. Amendments to the Postgraduate Codes of Practice

- 47.3 The Senate noted that on the recommendation of the Postgraduate Committee, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved the amendments to the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Taught Students and the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students.

4. Student Monitoring

- 47.4 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning had approved a proposal to modify the existing monitoring process in the first instance as follows: subsequent to receiving an initial monitoring report (C6) students are required to respond to the Schools/Course Co-ordinators rather than the Registry, as is the case currently. Schools/Course Co-ordinators therefore become responsible for the removal of the C6 in the student record system. This change is made as a precursor to a wider review of student monitoring to be undertaken over the coming months, and is subject to securing the necessary resource from DIT to make the changes required

SENATE MINUTES

- 48.1 The Senate endorsed the recommendation from the Senate Business Committee that Senate Minutes should not make specific reference to named individuals.

TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE STRUCTURES

- 49.1 The Senate, for its part, approved the revisions to the Teaching and Learning Committee Structure (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes).

ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSORS TO COURT

- 50.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had approved the timetable for the election of Senate Assessors to Court (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes)

JOHN REID TRUST

- 51.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had approved the appointment of Professor Kevin Docherty (vice Professor Duncan Shaw) as a member of the Board for the John Reid Trust with immediate effect on the recommendation of the Heads of the Colleges of Arts & Social Sciences and Life Sciences & Medicine.

DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

- 52.1 The Senate noted, on the recommendation of the relevant Heads of College, that the Senate Business Committee had approved the appointments of the following as Directors of Undergraduate Programmes with effect from the start of session 2011/12 for one year in the first instance:

Arts & Social Sciences	Dr S Lawrie (Language & Literature)
Law	Mr M Radford (Law)
Science	Dr K Shennan (Medical Sciences)
Medicine	Professor L Ritchie (Medicine).

RECTORIAL ELECTION: PROCEDURES

- 53.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved revisions to the Campaign Rules for the Rectorial Election and the timetable for the forthcoming election to be held in the autumn (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

CLOSING REMARKS

- 54.1 In drawing the meeting to a close, the Principal thanked Senate members for their efforts over the past year.