

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

**Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 17 November 2004**

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Houlihan, Dr JG Roberts, Professors Gane, Haites, Rodger, Hubbuck, Sleeman, Baker, Bruce, Buckland, Sharp, Macinnes, Jordan, Flin, Saunders, Beaumont, Dr B Fennel, Professor Secombes, Dr P McGeorge, Professors Mitchell, Imrie, Mrs DW McKenzie Skene, Dr WF Long, Professor Urwin, Dr IA McFarland, Professor Archbold, Dr P Benson, Mr WCT Brotherstone, Miss R Buchan, Mr J Chalmers, Ms L Clark, Dr G Coghill, Professor Duff, Dr JC Forbes, Dr S Lawrie, Dr J Liversidge, Professors Lurie, Salmon, Dr P Edwards, Dr D Hay, Dr WD McCausland, Dr MR Masson, Dr P Mealor, Dr WG Naphy, Mrs ML Ross, Dr H Sinclair, Dr J Skakle, Mr SC Styles, Professor Syrotinski, Dr SP Townsend, Professor Watson, Dr PRK Wells, Mr C Mair, Miss D White, Miss M Wylie and Miss J Niven.

Apologies: Professors MacGregor, Templeton, Ritchie, Chandler, Fraser, Booth, Dawson, Hannaford, Watson, Ingold, Ayres, Webster, Devine, Frost, Smith, Mrs L Stephen, Professor Blaikie, Dr J Geddes, Dr M Holmes, Dr X Lambin, Dr J MacDowall, Dr LH Philip, Dr ER van Teijlingen, Dr HM Wallace, Mr P Richards, Mr G Murray and Mr D Donaldson.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

890. The minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2004 were approved.

**REVIEW OF HONORARY DEGREES**

891.1 The Senate received a report from the Honorary Degrees Committee, which had reviewed the range of Honorary Degrees offered by the University, and considered whether any changes should be made to the present system and criteria for selecting and approving candidates for Honorary Degrees and the most appropriate mechanism for recognising achievement and success among the University's own staff (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).

891.2 The Senate noted that, traditionally, the LLD had been awarded not only to distinguished lawyers but to those who had made outstanding contributions to public life in fields other than law. However, in recent years, the LLD had been awarded more frequently as a "general" honorary degree than as a "specialist" degree. Of the University's Honorary Doctoral Degrees, only the LLD may be awarded for reasons other than an outstanding and distinctive contribution to the relevant discipline(s) or profession(s).

891.3 The Honorary Degrees Committee had therefore considered a proposal that the University should award a general Honorary Doctoral Degree, the Honorary Degree of Doctor *Honoris Causa* (DHC), to candidates who were considered to merit doctoral status but for whom the Degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) was not considered to be appropriate.

891.4 The Senate, after discussion, approved the following recommendations:

- (i) That the Degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) *honoris causa* should be awarded to those (a) who had made an outstanding and distinctive contribution to legal science, through legal research or in the practice of law; or (b) who had made an outstanding contribution to public life, at either national or international level.
- (ii) That the University should offer a new Honorary Doctoral Degree, the Degree of Doctor *Honoris Causa* (DHC), for candidates for whom it was considered appropriate to award an Honorary Doctoral Degree and whose candidature did not meet the criteria for the LLD set out in (i) above. In approving this recommendation, the Senate agreed that all of the University's Honorary Doctoral Degrees were of equivalent standing: each, however, had different criteria for their award.
- (iii) That the Degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) should continue to be offered as a research degree in accordance with Scottish Universities Ordinance No. 1 (which related to the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews).

- (iv) That no change be made to the practice concerning the award of Honorary Degrees to current, retired or honorary members of staff of the University, i.e. that such nominations should be regarded as exceptional and any recommendation for such an award must be supported by special circumstances. In approving this recommendation, the Senate noted that there had been several examples of such exceptions having been made in recent years.
- (v) That there should be no change to the current practice of not awarding Honorary Degrees to UK Politicians while still in Office, to avoid the University being considered to have particular political affiliations.
- (vi) That the University should continue to recognise and honour, by the award of an Honorary Degree, distinguished academics and those who had made outstanding contributions to public service or their profession, even where candidates had no or a limited connection with the University or its region. In reaching this decision, the Senate noted that one rationale for awarding Honorary Degrees was the potential to foster close relations with those with whom it was honouring. The Senate agreed, however, that the Honorary Degrees Committee, in considering nominations for candidates who had no connection whatsoever with either the University or its region, other than those indicated above, should give careful consideration to such nominations and ensure that there were convincing reasons for recommending any such candidates to the Senate for the award of an honorary degree.
- (vii) That the University should consider how staff could be rewarded for long service, and how staff and students could be recognised for outstanding or remarkable achievement.

891.5 In approving recommendation (ii) above, the Senate also approved and agreed to forward to the University Court, the following draft Resolution:

**RESOLUTION No < > of 2004**

**[Degree of Doctor *Honoris Causa* (DHC)]**

After consultation with the Senatus Academicus, the University Court of the University of Aberdeen, at its meeting on < >, passed the following Resolution:

1. The Degree of Doctor *Honoris Causa* (DHC) may be conferred by the University of Aberdeen.
2. The degree shall be conferred *honoris causa tantum*.
3. This Resolution shall come into force on the day on which it is passed by the University Court.

891.6 The Senate also agreed that the voting form for honorary degree candidates should include the principal reason for their nomination having been approved by the Honorary Degrees Committee rather than just stating their occupation or profession.

**STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL**

892.1 The Principal reported that, while the University had been reasonably successful in increasing its research income over the past few years, there had been less success in recovering the indirect costs of research grants and contracts. However, the results for the first quarter of the current financial year were indicating a positive trend, both in attracting new research council awards and improving indirect cost recovery.

**ADMISSIONS REPORT: OCTOBER 2004**

893.1 Professor Houlihan introduced the annual Admissions Report (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). He indicated that admissions to the University had generally been very favourable and the University had achieved its targets in almost all areas. While there had been early cause for concern in regard to the BSc target, the overall numbers admitted to the BSc had proved very satisfactory. The University had also been particularly successful in recruiting international students. Professor Houlihan therefore congratulated all those concerned in the recruitment and admissions process.

- 893.2 In spite of the favourable picture overall, Professor Houlihan drew attention to under-recruitment of postgraduate taught funded places: there was serious concern that not only might the University be subject to claw back of SHEFC funding this year, but that there may be a concomitant, future, reduction in a number of postgraduate taught places funded by SHEFC. A working group had been established by the University Management Group to tackle these issues and, as a consequence, several programmes, including some new programmes, would be marketed aggressively for a second half-session intake. Again, Professor Houlihan recorded his thanks to all concerned.
- 893.3 The Senate also noted that the UMG had agreed that the Working Group should become a formal Postgraduate Strategy Advisory Group, to be chaired by Professor Houlihan and reporting direct to the UMG, with an overall remit of maintaining a strategic overview, in its wider sense, of the University's postgraduate student population.

### ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

- 894.1 Dr Roberts introduced the paper that had been circulated which set out Scotland's new approach to quality assurance and enhancement now that SHEFC no longer required the QAA to review the University's educational provision subject by subject (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). Under the new framework, the University's management of quality and standards would be audited at the macro rather than the micro level through the process known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), which would look at the effectiveness of an institution's arrangements for managing quality assurance. The outcome of ELIR would be a public judgement about the level of confidence to be placed in the University's QA procedures.
- 894.2 Dr Roberts indicated that the main difference between the English and Scottish schemes was that the Scottish process would consider how we managed quality enhancement: the "deliberate steps" the University was taking to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of its students – one of the SHEFC conditions of grant. At the heart of this was the QE strategy and action plan that Senate had approved in 2003 and how these were being implemented at University, College and School levels.
- 894.3 Senate noted that this aspect of the review would be based, at least in theory, on a constructive dialogue between the Review Panel and the University, the outcome of which would be a commentary on the University's approach to quality that was designed to provide food for further reflection. Dr Roberts emphasised that while the intention was for this aspect of the review to be formative and developmental, its outcome would be a public document that could either enhance or damage the University's reputation in the eyes of potential students and their parents. That was one reason why the forthcoming ELIR was important.
- 894.4 The other reason was that the process of preparing the Reflective Analysis, on which the review would be based, was an opportunity for serious critical reflection about the "deliberate steps" the University had taken to improve our students' learning experience since 1998, the date of our last Institutional Audit, in the context of changes both in our own institution and in the external quality environment. This process of critical self-appraisal was an opportunity to affirm what the University believed were the strengths of its current approach and to exemplify these through a few well-chosen case studies. Equally important, however, was the chance the process would provide to identify weaknesses and decide how these should be addressed.
- 894.5 In outlining the timetable for preparing for the Review Panel's visit in March and April 2005, Dr Roberts indicated that the drafting of the University's submission to the QAA, our Reflective Analysis, was well underway and would be circulated widely for comment and discussion prior to being submitted to the Senate in January. The deadline for its submission to the QAA was 2 February 2005.
- 894.6 In terms of the University's strengths, Dr Roberts indicated that the Reflective Analysis would highlight the following, the last three of which would feature in case studies to accompany the Reflective Analysis:
- the development of our QE strategy as a framework for University, College and School action plans;
  - the creation of a new teaching and learning infrastructure at College and School levels;
  - the robustness of our revised Internal Teaching Review system;

- the recent revision of our class representative system by the Students' Association with a view to making it more effective;
- the promotion of e-learning through the innovative projects supported by the partnership between our academic staff and the Learning Technology Unit;
- our programme of investment in teaching infrastructure: for example, the refurbishment of two large teaching laboratories in Zoology which had enabled the introduction of new ways of teaching and learning.

894.7 In terms of potential areas for improvement, Dr Roberts highlighted the following:

- our student feedback system: this was being addressed by a working group, convened by Dr Fennell, that would draw on the outcome of last year's QE theme on Responding to Student Needs;
- the lack of co-ordination of the work of our various learning support services - the Educational and Staff Development Unit, the Learning Technology Unit and the Academic Learning and Study Unit, each based in a different administrative department: this was being looked at as part of the DISS review;
- our arrangements for sharing best practice through engagement with the national QE themes and the Higher Education Academy's subject centres and the dissemination of the outcomes of Internal Teaching Review;
- our policies and practices in relation to the professional development of staff, both new and experienced, for their roles in teaching and learning;
- our systems for recognising and rewarding excellence in this area;
- how the University manages the implementation of our QE (as distinct from QA) strategy across the institution.

894.8 In concluding his presentation, Dr Roberts believed that, emerging from the critical reflection of the University's strengths and weaknesses, a picture was emerging of an institution:

- which had developed an effective approach to Quality Assurance, the outcomes of which were regularly used to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and which was now seeking to move the emphasis on to Quality Enhancement - but without compromising the robustness of its QA;
- one that regularly reviewed and revised key elements of its QA strategy in the light of changes to the external quality environment;
- one whose academic staff were conscientious teachers with a strong concern for the welfare of their students - but who perceived that their career advancement depended primarily on their research performance;
- one in which a good deal of effective innovation had taken place at subject level but usually in a rather *ad hoc* way, and which was now seeking to manage the process in a more integrated and systematic way at School and College levels;
- one, however, in which few academic staff participated in institutionally organised educational staff development, and in which few departments regularly engaged with their disciplinary peers through their Higher Education Academy subject centres, [Dr Roberts acknowledged that this part of the picture needed to be qualified by the QE role that professional accreditation bodies played in respect of some of the University's disciplines];
- an institution whose QA and QE strategies depended on maintaining the strong and effective partnership it had developed with its students;
- one, finally, which was committed to excellence in teaching and research, and had embarked on a comprehensive review of its teaching and learning strategy as a way of making that link more explicit and effective.

894.9 In the discussion that ensued, the following principal points were noted:

- the importance of ensuring that the University was actively addressing implementation of the Bologna Agreement; and, in a wider international context, to ensure that the employability strategy of the University was of value to all its students. To this end, Dr Roberts was asked to establish a short-term group to consider these issues:
- that high on the agenda of the Senior Vice-Principal was how the University should reward its staff for excellence and innovation in teaching.

894.10 In closing the debate, Dr Roberts invited members of Senate to email him with any comments in regard to the University's mechanisms and strategies for quality assurance and enhancement, and in regard to the ELIR process in general.

### **REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

(2 November 2004)

895.1 The Senate noted that the University Court had approved, for its part, the establishment of a joint Court and Senate Committee for Research Ethics and Governance (Senate Minute 878 refers); and that the Court had approved recommendations as indicated in a report on research strategic alliances (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

### **REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

(22 October 2004)

#### **1. Class Representative System – Enhancements for 2004/05**

896.1 The Senate noted that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) had received a paper on enhancements to the Class Representative system for 2004/05. The UCTL had noted that during 2004/05 the Students' Association (SA) would be operating an enhanced system for the identification and training of Class Representatives. The new system was intended to provide a more robust mechanism for identifying and updating the SA on who was acting as Class Representatives.

896.2 The Senate also noted that the Committee had expressed concern with regard to the problems encountered by Schools in securing sufficient Class Representatives, and had concluded that this was a perennial, sectoral problem. By working in partnership with the SA, it was hoped that the University would be able to address this problem. In particular it was hoped that the Future Skills initiative, currently being undertaken by the Careers Service and the SA, would have a positive impact on the situation.

#### **2. Programme Specifications**

896.3 The Senate noted that the UCTL had received a paper informing them of a proposed framework for publishing Programme Specifications in line with guidance issued by the QAA. The Committee had noted that Heads of School had discussed the minimum information prescribed by the QAA for inclusion in such documents and had proposed that the establishment of a database to manage the Programme Specification data should be explored by the Registry. In endorsing this proposal, the Committee had particularly welcomed the intention to provide the University with a more homogeneous approach to the provision of this data. Furthermore it was agreed that such a move would enable a more centralised approach to data management thus preventing duplication of effort.

#### **3. Student Monitoring – Review of Operation of System in Second Half-session 2004/05**

896.4 The Senate noted that the UCTL had received a paper updating them on the operation of the Student Monitoring System during the second half-session of 2003/04. The Committee had noted that the trends emerging from the data for the second half-session were broadly similar to those shown in the first half-session of 2003/04. In particular there were a significant proportion of 'at risk' reports remaining unresolved due to no further action being taken by Advisers of Study. The Committee had further noted that the modifications to the system approved by Senate in May 2004, which established the Registry as the 'gatekeeper' to the system, should help to address some of the problems noted during 2003/04.

- 896.5 The Senate also noted that the UCTL had agreed to review operation of the modified system during 2004/05, with preliminary findings being reported in December 2004. The Committee had further agreed that consideration may have to be given to extending the current two year trial, although concerns had been expressed with regard to any continuation to the abolition of the sanction of Class Certificate refusal.

#### **4. 'Compulsory' Courses and the Provision of Resits at Honours**

- 896.6 In June 2004, the Senate had approved a paper from the UCTL on the *Review of the Grade Spectrum* and the Provision of Resits at Honours. Following a query from one School in regard to the definition of the term 'Compulsory' course used in the *Guidance Note for Students who either Fail, or who Fail to Attend or Complete, an Element of Prescribed Degree Assessment*, the Committee had agreed a definition of such courses. These were not courses listed in the programme prescription in the University Calendar as being a requirement for the Degree. Rather, they were a small number of courses that were, for instance, prescribed as a specific requirement for the award of a degree which was accredited by a Professional or Statutory Body (PSB) and where such a PSB required a course to be passed at the first attempt. Schools should seek permission from the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate) to cite such courses as 'compulsory'.

#### **5. Review of Teaching & Learning Strategy**

- 896.7 The Senate noted that the UCTL had noted the remit, membership and reporting schedule for the Review Group for the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The Convener, on behalf of the Committee, had approved the establishment of this Working Group.

#### **6. Employability Strategy Working Group**

- 896.8 The Senate noted that the UCTL had considered a paper setting out background information on the 2004/05 Enhancement Theme on Employability and that an Employability Strategy Working Group had been established to oversee the University's engagement with this theme and, in particular, to develop an institutional employability strategy that incorporated provision for personal development planning. The Convener, on behalf of the Committee, had approved the establishment of this Working Group.

#### **7. Report to SHEFC on ITR Activity 2003/04**

- 896.9 The Senate noted that, following the revisions to the external assurance of quality and the decision to no longer conduct external QAA Subject Review, responsibility now rested with Institutions to conduct internal reviews of their provision. In implementing this change, SHEFC had asked to be kept informed by institutions of the progress and outcome of internal reviews to ensure that all provision was periodically reviewed. As a consequence, from 2003/04, SHEFC would request, on an annual basis, a progress report in internal reviews from each institution. The UCTL had noted the Statement on Progress of Internal Subject Review for 2003/04 submitted to SHEFC.

#### **8. Academic Quality Handbook**

- 896.10 The Senate noted that the new version of the Academic Quality Handbook should become available on the web in November.

#### **9. Enhancement-led Institutional Review – Composition of Review Team**

- 896.11 The Senate noted the composition of the ELIR Review Team which would visit the University 16 & 17 March and 25-29 April 2005 to conduct our Institutional Review, as under:

Professor Graham Chesters, University of Hull (Reviewer)  
Mr Alan Walker, Glasgow School of Art (Reviewer)  
Dr Karl Leydecker, University of Stirling (Reviewer)  
Mr Tim Shand, University of Glasgow (Student Reviewer)  
Ms Lesley Rowand, University of Edinburgh (Review Secretary)

## REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES

### 1. Validation Agreement: UHI Millennium Institute

- 897.1 The Senate approved, for its part, on the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate), and agreed to forward to the University Court, a Validation Agreement between the University and the UHI Millennium Institute in regard to the delivery of programmes in either Electrical or Mechanical Engineering with Nuclear Decommissioning Studies, which would lead to the award of the University of Aberdeen Degree of Bachelor of Engineering (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). The Senate also noted that the Validation Panel's report was available at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/accreditation.shtml>

### 2. New and Discontinued Courses and Programmes

- 897.2 The Senate noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), on the recommendation of the relevant Colleges, had approved changes to the list of courses and programmes available as under:

#### (A) POSTGRADUATE COURSES

##### Agriculture

Introduction of new level 5 course: 'Animal Management Case Studies' (replacing AG5308).

##### Education

Introduction of new level 5 course: ' Interprofessional Working for Language Support' (replacing ED5147)

##### Film Studies

Introduction of new level 5 course: 'Collective Visions: Photography and Identity in Latin America and Spain'; 'Issues in Visual Culture'; 'Film, the Visible and the Invisible'.

##### Geography

Introduction of new level 5 course: 'An Introduction to the Geospatial Technologies' (replacing GG5302).

## REPORT FROM THE STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

(11 November 2004)

- 898.1 The Senate approved, for its part, the recommendation of the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee that there be no change to the Going Rates for 2006 entry for all undergraduate degrees other than for the MBChB degree, which would be changed as follows in regard to A Levels and the Irish Leaving Certificate (Higher Level):

##### A Levels

AAB (currently ABB) including Chemistry and one other Science, excluding General Studies)

##### Irish Leaving Certificate (Higher Level)

AAAAAA (currently AAAAAB) including Chemistry and two other Sciences, excluding Irish

## REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH, INCOME GENERATION AND COMMERCIALISATION

- 899.1 The Senate approved the recommendations of the Committee on Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation that Dr A Preece and Professor IR Booth be appointed to the Committee with immediate effect, *vice* Professors Player and Ralston, respectively.

### JOHN REID'S TRUST SCHEME

- 900.1 The Senate approved the nominations, by the Heads of the relevant Colleges, of Professor Kunin as a Life Governor of the John Reid's Trust *vice* Professor Cameron and Professor Shaw as a Governor *vice* Professor Kunin.

### CATHERINE MCCAIG'S TRUST

- 901.1 The Senate approved the nomination, by the Head of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, of Dr M MacLeod as a Governor of the Catherine McCaig's Trust *vice* Dr K Hollo.

### SENATE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC APPEALS COMMITTEE

- 902.1 The Senate approved the appointment of Dr J Knight to the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee with immediate effect *vice* Dr M-J MacLeod, on the recommendation of the Head of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine.

### ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSOR TO THE UNIVERSITY COURT

- 903.1 The Senate noted that Mrs ML Ross had been elected as a Senate Assessor to the University Court with immediate effect until 30 September 2007, *vice* Professor Graham.

### ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSOR TO THE JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

- 904.1 The Senate noted that Professor IR Booth had been elected as a Senate Assessor to the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee with immediate effect for the duration of his assessorship to the University Court, *vice* Professor Graham.

### STUDENT MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE

- 905.1 The Senate noted the following:-

- (i) that members of the Students' Association had been elected to serve on the Senate for the academic year 2004/05, as under:-

President	:	Paul Richards
Vice-President (Education)	:	Calum Mair
Area of Study Conveners		
Arts & Social Sciences	:	Greg Murray
Law	:	Craig Wood
Engineering	:	Peter Oosterhof
Medicine	:	Deborah White
Postgraduate	:	David Donaldson
Vice -President (Advice and Support) [in attendance]	:	Mhairi Wylie
Academic Affairs Committee Convener [in attendance]	:	Judith Niven

- (ii) that the posts of Area of Study Conveners for Education, Divinity and Science have yet to be filled.

### GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA*

- 906.1 The Senate noted that details of those qualified to receive degrees, diplomas and other awards who had applied to have them conferred *in absentia* was available in the Senate Office of the Registry (see Appendix to Minutes of June 2005).
- 906.2 The Senate agreed to confer the degrees on, and awarded the diplomas and other qualifications to, the persons stated.