

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 November 2003

Present: Principal, Professor Sewel, Dr J Roberts, Professors Rodger, MacGregor, Ms C Macaslan, Professors Thomson, Baker, Jolliffe, Sharp, Chandler, Flin, Mitchell, Secombes, Dr Fennell, Professors Kunin, Imrie, Ms M Ramsay, Professor Burgess, Ms D McKenzie Skene, Dr W Long, Dr A Clarke, Professors, Archbold, Duff, Hotson, Liversidge, Saunders, Dr S Lawrie, Professor Adams, Dr P Benson, Ms L Clark, Dr I Craw, Dr P Edwards, Dr J Geddes, Dr D Hay, Dr X Lambin, Dr W McCausland, Dr M Masson, Dr J Ollason, Mrs M Ross, Dr H Sinclair, Dr J Skakle, Dr S Townsend, Dr N Dower, Ms J Duncan, Mr G Humphries, Ms N Drennan and Ms D White.

Apologies for absence were received from Professors Forrester, Templeton, Sleeman, Urwin, Bruce, Racey, Gane, Webster, Little, Killham, Fraser, Bryden, Dawson, Simpson, Howe, Player, Ayres, Webster, Ms R Buchan, Mrs L Stephen, Mr G Pryor, Professor Blaikie, Dr G Coghill, Professors Lurie, Reid, Salmon, Shucksmith, Dr D Heddle, Dr S Lawrie, Dr J Farmer, Dr C Gray, Dr M Holmes, Mrs B Hookey, Dr J King, Dr P Kinnear, Dr H McKenzie, Dr D MacPhee, Dr A Memon, Dr D Pearson, Professor Syrotinski, Dr H Wallace and Mr D Donaldson.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

776. The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2003 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

777.1 The Senate noted that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council had undertaken a formal visit to the University on 10 November 2003 as part of a programme of bi-ennial visits to institutions. The purpose of the visit was to provide an opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the aspirations and progress of institutions. SHEFC also used the visits as one of the ways to satisfy itself that institutions were meeting the conditions of grant that covered equality of opportunity and widening participation, continuous improvement of learning and teaching, research and knowledge transfer, human resource policies and management. The Chairman of the Funding Council had acted as chair of the SHEFC panel.

777.2 The Principal reported that the Funding Council had formed the view that the University was towards the lower end of the scale in terms of Scottish Universities' research competitiveness. Cause for concern had also arisen the day before the Senate when, at a public meeting between SHEFC, Ministers from the Scottish Executive and representative of HEIs, it had been made clear that there were unlikely to be any new significant funds for Higher Education in the foreseeable future. The position for HEIs was therefore not encouraging and the Principal believed that the University of Aberdeen was at a crossroads. Critical to the University's future would be the necessity to improve the University's research competitiveness in order to achieve the vision, which had been endorsed by the Senate over the past few years, that the University should be research-driven. The Principal believed that the actions and decisions taken by the Senate and the University generally over the past two years reflected the desire to achieve this vision. The move to the Colleges structure and the current voluntary severance and early retirement schemes were key to providing the necessary flexibility and creating the capacity to allow the University to build its research strengths. As a consequence of these strategies, there would be a significant number of vacancies to fill over the next two years. The main objective now was to ensure that the filling of vacancies produced a transformational change in the quality of the University's research output. To this end, the Principal indicated that academic staff should be encouraged to participate in shaping the University's future by bringing forward, through their Heads of School and Heads of College, the names of those from within their networks whom they believed would meet the University's criteria for recruitment to these vacancies. The Heads of College, in consultation with their Heads of School, were developing their recruitment and investment strategies, which were at an advanced stage, and would be consulting staff in due course. The Principal therefore encouraged members of the Senate to put forward names for consideration as part of this strategy.

- 777.3 In closing his statement, the Principal informed the Senate that the University had been working closely with the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and with the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute to establish a Centre for Environmental Sustainability on the Macaulay campus. This was an extremely exciting opportunity for the University, and the Principal invited Professor Houlihan to update the Senate on this matter.
- 777.4 Professor Houlihan referred to the recent email to all staff inviting them to attend the forthcoming NERC meeting to be held in Aberdeen, and he indicated that several colleagues within the University were actively involved in developing the proposals. If the proposals came to fruition, Aberdeen would become the focal point for environmental sustainability, which would be good news both for the University and the local community.

ADMISSIONS REPORT

- 778.1 Professor Houlihan introduced the Admissions Report (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). In particular, he highlighted the success of the recruitment strategy for full-time fundable (i.e. UK/EU) first degree students, and reported that, generally, the ratio of applications received to students recruited had improved over the past few years. This was a very encouraging trend. Overseas first degree admissions had increased overall compared with the previous year, and recruitment to education and of part-time students was very satisfactory.
- 778.2 However, the Senate noted that the position concerning postgraduate students was less favourable. The total number of fundable UK/EU students currently admitted was significantly lower than the full-year target, which was now unlikely to be met. While overseas and full-cost taught postgraduate numbers were maintained overall, there had been shifts in recruitment patterns, with significant falls in admissions against expected numbers for some programmes.
- 778.3 The significant shortfall against target in research student recruitment was particularly worrying in light of the general comments referred to in the Principal's statement concerning the University's research positioning. These figures reinforced the need to review the admissions procedures. Senate noted that this matter was currently actively being discussed within the Colleges and proposals would be considered by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee and the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) in early December.
- 778.4 In the discussion that followed, the following points were noted:
- (i) that the overall full-time fundable first degree student population had exceeded the University's quota to the extent that SHEFC would claw-back excess fee income: this was largely attributable to the combination of exceeding the target for new MA students and more students returning to study than expected;
 - (ii) that the targets for research students had been agreed by the former Faculties and that the new, more transparent, budgetary process had taken account of these targets: it would therefore be for the Colleges to determine strategies to achieve the targets.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

(4 November 2003)

779. The Senate noted that the University Court had approved the proposals for College and Sub-College Structures, as approved by the Senate on 8 October 2003; and, in doing so, had approved Resolution No. 231 of 2003 [Reform of Academic Structure].

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

(24 October 2003)

1. Assuring and Enhancing Quality and Standards in Teaching and Learning while Reducing the Burden

- 780.1 The Senate approved the recommendations set out in the paper entitled 'Assuring and Enhancing Quality and Standards in Teaching and Learning while Reducing the Burden' (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).

780.2 The Senate also noted that any suggestions for further reducing the burden should be sent to the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning).

2. Examination Timetabling

781.1 The Senate approved the recommendations that the deadline for return of first half-session Level 1-4 and undergraduate Level 5 results should be extended (Minutes 793 (a) (i) and (ii) below refer).

781.2 The Senate noted that the UCTL would work with the College Teaching and Learning Committees and the Registry to review the examination timetabling arrangements for the May and August diets and would bring forward recommendations in due course.

3. Quality Enhancement Strategy

782.1 The Senate approved the Quality Enhancement Strategy (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).

4. Policy on Part-Exemptions

783.1 The Senate approved the recommendations in regard to exemptions from parts of courses as outlined below. These recommendations had been made following a complaint brought by a student granted part-exemption from a course. It was noted that the University, currently, did not have a clear policy in regard to this matter.

- (i) that Heads of School have the authority to grant students, on application, exemption from attendance on, and from taking the related assessment for, parts of courses where students have demonstrated prior successful achievement of the learning outcomes for the part(s) in question (e.g. by passing other courses, either at the University or elsewhere) and may, at their discretion, devolve this responsibility to Course Co-ordinators;
- (ii) that where part-exemptions are granted, the overall CAS mark for the course in question shall be based entirely on a student's performance in the assessment for the part of the course completed by the student, i.e. the part of the course from which exemption was not granted;
- (iii) that students applying for part-exemptions from courses should be informed, by the Course Co-ordinator, of (ii) above in writing before deciding whether or not to accept a part-exemption. [Note: It should be for Course Co-ordinators to determine the best mechanism for providing students with this information in writing].

5. Procedures for Appointment of External Examiners

784.1 The Senate approved the revision of paragraph 9.6.1 of the Academic Quality Handbook concerning the appointment of External Examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes who were nominated by Heads of School, as indicated below. The revision had been proposed in the light of the establishment of Colleges and also represented a streamlining of the process which, hitherto, had included all Deans and the Senior Vice-Principal.

9.6.1 Nominations for the appointment of External Examiners are scrutinised by the Head of the relevant College (or his/her nominee) and by the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning who, in approving or rejecting nominations, will monitor that the criteria indicated in paragraph 9.5.5 above (not reproduced here) are applied.'

784.2 The Senate noted that the criteria in paragraph 9.5.5 had been in place for many years and related, *inter alia*, to the requirement that External Examiners should have substantial experience in teaching and learning and should hold an academic appointment of at least Senior Lecturer level].

6. Class Start and End Times

785.1 The Senate noted that the Teachability Exercise was being rolled out across the University. As part of this exercise, academic staff had been reviewing the accessibility of their curricula and assessments for students with a range of impairments. This exercise had highlighted the practical matter of allowing sufficient time for students with mobility difficulties to get from one class to the next, particularly where the latter was held some distance from the first.

785.2 In view of the above, the Senate approved the formal promulgation of the current informal convention that classes should begin five minutes after the hour and finish five minutes before the hour as official policy for the benefit of all students, but particularly those with impaired mobility.

7. Review of Honours Entry Requirements

786.1 The Senate noted that, following a request from the Students' Association that the UCTL review 'the matter of entry into honours and the arbitrary thresholds imposed by certain departments within the University', the UCTL had undertaken a survey of honours entry requirements across the University. Following consideration of the outcome of this survey, the UCTL had established a small Working Group to discuss the possible development of a policy regarding the imposition of requirements for entrance to Honours degree programmes that would be additional to the mandatory levels of credit points for Years 1 & 2 or Years 1, 2 and 3 – i.e. 240 or 360 credit points respectively, as appropriate.

786.2 The Senate also noted that the UCTL had approved the following recommendations:-

- (i) that students should receive written notification of any additional Honours entry requirements *before* embarking upon any course in which they must gain the said additional requirements;
- (ii) that information about School policy on entrance requirements to Honours degree programmes should be made available to students *before* they entered the School – e.g. in University prospectus, on School web site etc.

8. UCTL Annual Report to Senate

787.1 The Senate noted that the UCTL prepared, on an annual basis, a report to the Senate summarising the main issues which had been addressed over the previous year in regard to teaching and learning and also detailing statistical data in regard to appeals, discipline cases, withdrawals and cases considered by the Students' Progress Committee. These reports had been produced for the past three years following a request that Senate be kept informed of teaching and learning issues. These reports had been essentially reflective and, in the main, summarised all the policy issues that Senate had agreed over the previous year. Furthermore, UCTL communications to Senate for each meeting had become increasingly detailed and, in many cases, the contents of the annual report had largely reiterated the information contained in these communications rather than focusing on the future and on important statistical information.

787.2 In view of the above, Heads of School had been asked to consider whether the format of the annual UCTL report to Senate should be revised, firstly to provide a forward look to the work of the UCTL in the forthcoming year and, secondly, to focus any reflective comment on statistical information in regard to appeals, complaints, discipline, withdrawals and cases from the Students' Progress Committees. Heads of School had endorsed this proposal and, accordingly, the report for 2002/03 had been written in the revised format. The UCTL approved the revised format of the report.

787.3 The UCTL had further noted that the timing of submission of the report to Senate was not ideal as it could prove difficult to obtain accurate information in regard to withdrawals in time for the October meeting of the UCTL: the close proximity to the start of term resulted in it not being possible to determine the number of students who, whilst eligible to return, had chosen not to do so. It was therefore proposed that, in future, the annual report should be presented to the December meeting of the UCTL and to the January meeting of the Senate. This was endorsed by the Senate.

9. Review of Group Work

788.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Undergraduate Academic Appeals Committee (SUAAC) had recently heard an appeal from a student who was concerned about the procedures adopted by one School in regard to the assessment of group work. In particular, the student expressed concern about the policy whereby all students in a group received the same CAS mark for the group work element. The SUAAC agreed to refer the matter to the UCTL for consideration. A survey of the use of, and assessment arrangements for, group work would be conducted and a report would be brought to a future meeting of the UCTL.

GOING RATES FOR 2005 ENTRY

789. 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 2005 entry. This recommendation would be considered by the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee on 2 December 2003.

MEMBERSHIP OF HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE

790. The Senate approved the following nominees from the Heads of College for membership of the Honorary Degrees Committee:-

Ms CA Macaslan, Professors Gilbert, Howe, Ingold, Kunin, McDonald, Player, Secombes, Smith.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH, INCOME GENERATION AND COMMERCIALISATION

791. The Senate approved the following nominees from the Heads of College for membership of the University Committee for Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation:-

Professors Ingold, Webster, Killham, Ralston and Player.

JOHN REID'S TRUST SCHEME

- 792.1 The Senate approved the nominations, by the Heads of College, of Professors Archbold and Kunin to be the Senate's representatives as trustees of the John Reid Trust for five years with immediate effect.
- 792.2 The Senate also approved a recommendation from the Trust that the Senate's current representatives, Professors Boyle and Cameron, be appointed as life Governors of the Trust following the recent completion of their term of office as trustees.

LATEST DATE FOR THE RETURN OF EXAMINATION RESULTS: 2003-2004

- 793 The Senate approved the latest dates for the return of examination results in the session 2003-2004, as under:

(a) January 2004 Diet of Examinations

- (i) Level 1 and 2 courses by Wednesday 18 February 2004
- (ii) Level 3, 4 and undergraduate Level 5, courses by Friday 20 February 2004
- (iii) Postgraduate taught courses by Friday 27 February 2004

(b) May/June 2004 Diet of Examinations

- (i) All Level 1 to 4 and undergraduate Level 5 courses and undergraduate programmes by Friday 18 June 2004, except those in (ii) below.
- (ii) MBChB and BSc Med Sci courses (years 2 or above) by the last date of the relevant Summer Term (i.e. Friday 25 June 2004 [year 2], 2 July 2004 [years 4 and 5], and 9 July 2004 [year 3]).
- (iii) Postgraduate taught course and programme results, for those candidates completing all the requirements of their programme and hoping to graduate in July 2004, by Friday 18 June 2004
- (iv) All other postgraduate taught courses by Friday 25 June 2004

(c) August 2004 Diet of Examinations

- (i) Level 1 to 4 and undergraduate Level 5 courses by Wednesday 1 September 2004
- (ii) Postgraduate taught courses and programmes by Friday 22 October 2004

(d) MB ChB (year 3) and BSc Medical Science Examinations held at other times

- (i) Phase II (3M): 26 March 2004 (1st attempt) and 30 April 2004 (resit)
- (ii) Phase III (3M): 4 June 2004
- (iii) BSc MedSci: 4 March 2004 and 25 August 2004

REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES

New and Discontinued Courses and Programmes

794.1 The Senate noted that the Academic Standards Committees, on the recommendation of the relevant Colleges, had approved changes to the list of courses and programmes available as under:

INDIVIDUAL DEGREE AND DIPLOMA COURSES (UNDERGRADUATE)

Accountancy

Introduction of new level 3 courses: 'Empirical Methods in Finance' and 'Sports and Leisure Studies'.

Introduction of new level 4 course: 'Empirical Methods in Finance' (with effect from 2004/2005).

Introduction of new level 4 course: 'Dissertation in Sports and Leisure Management'.

Chemistry

Introduction of new level 3 course: 'Topics in Biology for Chemistry Students'

Divinity

Withdrawal of the courses: DR3550 and DR3557.

Educational Studies

Introduction of new level 1 course: 'Learning 1:1'.

Engineering

Introduction of new level 3 courses: 'C Programming and Microcontrollers A'; 'C Programming and Microcontrollers B'; 'Electrical Machines and Drives'.

Geography

Withdrawal of course: GG3521

Geology

Withdrawal of course: GG2507

Key Learning

Introduction of new level 2 courses: 'Professional Ethics', 'Philosophy for Schools' and 'Special Project in Philosophy'.

Mathematical Sciences

Introduction of new level 3 course: 'Survival Statistics and Actuarial and Medical Applications'.

Withdrawal of course: MX3525

Psychology

Introduction of new level 3 course: 'Neuropsychology' (replaces PS3010)

NEW AND WITHDRAWN CERTIFICATE AND DEGREE PROGRAMMES (UNDERGRADUATE)

Degree of Master of Arts

Introduction of designated degree programme in Finance.

Withdrawal of honours degree programme in Celtic Civilisation (from 2004/2005 entry).

Withdrawal of all joint honours degree programmes with Economic History (from 2003/04 entry).

Withdrawal of honours degree programmes in Sports and Leisure Management (from 2004/2005 entry).

Withdrawal of designated degree programme in Sports and Leisure Management (from 2004/2005 entry).

Reinstatement of designated degree programme in Statistics.

Degree of Bachelor of Science

Withdrawal of honours degree in Countryside & Environmental Management (from 2003/04 entry).

Withdrawal of designated degree in Countryside & Environmental Management (from 2003/04 entry).

- 794.2 In view of the potential adverse impact of withdrawing programmes that were already advertised in the Prospectus, the Senate noted that the Colleges would consider how best to seek the views of relevant Admissions Selectors when considering proposals to introduce or withdraw programmes in terms of recruitment issues.

REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH, INCOME GENERATION AND COMMERCIALISATION (23 October 2003)

795. The Senate noted that the Committee for Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation had agreed to establish a Research Costing and Pricing Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee would be convened by the Vice-Principal (Research and Commercialisation) and would include five academic staff members (three from the college of Life Sciences and Medicine and one each from the Colleges of Physical Sciences and Arts and Social Sciences). The remit would be as follows:

- (a) To co-ordinate the implementation of strategies arising from transparency review, including the introduction of full economic costing.
- (b) To formulate, implement and monitor costing and pricing methodologies.
- (c) To review the performance of research grant applications against costing and pricing strategies.
- (d) To oversee transparency review data collection and returns.

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE

796. The Senate noted the following:-

- (i) that members of the Students' Association had been elected to serve on the Senate for the academic year 2003/04, as under:-

President	Ms Jenny Duncan
Academic Affairs Committee Convener	Mr James Dunphy
Area of Study Conveners:	
Arts & Social Sciences	Mr Duncan Cockburn
Education	Mr Gary Humphries
Law	Ms Nerissa Drennan
Medicine	Ms Debs White

Vice-President (Advice and Support) [in attendance] Mr David Donaldson

- (ii) that the posts of Postgraduate Convener and Area of Study Conveners for Divinity, Science and Engineering had yet to be filled.

GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA*

- 797.1 The Senate noted that the list of those qualified to receive degrees and diplomas who had applied to have them conferred *in absentia* was available in the Senate Office of the Registry.
- 797.2 The Senate conferred the degrees on, and awarded the diplomas and other qualifications to, the persons stated. [See Appendix to Minutes of June 2004].