

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2007

Present: Professors Logan, Houlihan, Ms C Macaslan, Professors Gane, Haites, Rodger, MacGregor, Bruce, Buckland, Sharp, Macinnes, Flin, Dawson, Saunders, Beaumont, Frost, Ms M Pearson, Professors Hughes, Secombes, Dr P McGeorge, Professors Imrie, Walkden, Duff, Robinson, Black, Dr P Edwards, Mr M Radford, Professor Long, Dr P Schlicke, Mrs L Stephen, Professor Burgess, Mrs W Pirie, Dr W McCausland, Mr W Brotherstone, Dr D Marsden, Dr J Schaper, Mrs R Fitzpatrick, Dr J Forbes, Dr P Mealar, Dr J Ravet, Dr S Lawrie, Mrs M Ross, Mr S Styles, Mr N Curtis, Dr A King, Professor Salmon, Dr J Sternberg, Dr A Jenkinson, Professor Lurie, Dr D Scott, Dr M Boroujerdi, Dr J Cleland, Dr T MacFarlane, Dr R Bull, Dr D Pearson, Dr W Harrison, Dr S Townsend, Dr L Philip, Mr R Miller, Mr D Bernard, Mr O Lash-Williams, Miss C Adelhardt, Miss Murray and Mr S McMenemy.

Apologies: Principal, Professor D MacDonald, Dr D Molyneaux, Mrs A Valyo, Professor Liversidge, Dr E van Teijlingen, Dr P Benson, Professor J Anderson, Dr M Masson, Dr T Norman, Dr J Skakle, Dr R Wells and Miss S Trofino.

In opening the meeting, Professor Logan gave the Principal's apologies. Regrettably, he was unable to be present as he was attending a family funeral.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LAST MEETING

11. The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2006 were approved.

STATEMENT BY SENIOR VICE-PRINCIPAL

12.1 The Senior Vice-Principal drew member's attention to the recent publication of the audited accounts for 2006 for all Scottish institutions. These showed, in terms of Research Grant income, Aberdeen to be in 3rd place below Edinburgh and Glasgow universities. Taking research income as a percentage of total income, Aberdeen ranks highest of all the universities. Our enhanced research activity was also demonstrated by a significant increase in research grant income from the Research Councils in all three Colleges.

12.2 He reminded members of the recent opening of the Health Sciences Building at Foresterhill by the Duchess of Rothesay.

12.3 He also informed Senate members that a bus sponsored by First Group had been recently launched to promote Aberdeen's involvement in medical research.

12.4 He also reported the University's recent success in a number of pooling initiatives sponsored by the Funding Council. He stressed the importance of the University's involvement in these in terms of our future research developments.

12.5 Finally, he drew attention to the Principal's recent letter to the University Community in regard to the Curricular Review. He informed members that discussions were ongoing with Heads of College to explore how to take this forward. These proposals would be brought to a future meeting of the Senate.

UPDATE ON RAE 2008: PLANNING AND THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

13.1 The Vice-Principal (Research and Commercialisation) presented an update on the RAE exercise. He reminded members that the University was aspiring to achieve an RAE profile characteristic of a research intensive university and of the highest quality possible.

13.2 He thanked those involved for their considerable efforts in the preparation and consideration of the draft RA5s. The analysis of the RA5s had helped the RAE Steering Group in taking forward the process of selection of staff and the units of assessment to be submitted. By late March he anticipated that the process of staff selection would be complete with approximately 32-35 Units of Assessment across the spectrum of our research activities. Based on current figures, around 506 FTE (approx 523 staff) would be included in the submission representing around 72% of eligible staff.

- 13.3 He informed Senate that the RAE Steering Group would continue to meet on a monthly basis. A 'dry-run' of all submissions would be conducted in June, with a view to final submission by the end of October 2007. Results would be expected in December 2008 and would inform funding models for 2009/2010.
- 13.4 Looking to the future, he advised Senate that the broad framework for research assessment and funding beyond RAE2008 was now known. There would be varying use of metrics across different disciplines, with the continuation of some form of expert involvement. In science, engineering, technology and medicine, a combination of research income, postgraduate research student data and a bibliometric indicator of quality would be used to assess research. In all other disciplines, there would be a significantly reduced, light touch peer review process informed by a range of discipline specific indicators.
- 13.5 Our publicly available outputs of research would remain one of the single most important instruments for the measurement and perception of research quality. Initiatives such as research pooling and emphasis on research themes and groupings would also become increasingly important in the future.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING: 2005-2006

- 14.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) presented the University Committee on Teaching and Learning's Annual Report to the Senate for 2005/06 (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). In opening, she noted that the UCTL would be reviewing the format of the report for the future, with the aim of the full report having a less retrospective focus and more emphasis on current and emerging topics.

In delivering the report for 2005/06, the Vice-Principal highlighted the following main issues:-

- The Learning and Teaching Strategy had been approved by the Senate in June 2006. Work was currently ongoing in regard to taking forward strands of key activity identified in the Strategy.
- The Centre for Learning and Teaching was established on 1 August 2006. The Centre would provide a focus for the University's quality enhancement activities. Work was ongoing to develop an operational plan for the Centre to support and guide its activities.
- An Advisory Board for Learning and Teaching had also been established to guide and shape the activities of the Centre for Learning and Teaching and to ensure cohesion of strategic planning in regard to teaching and learning. The Advisory Board would also identify major discussion items for the UCTL. Through its membership, the Advisory Board would be able to achieve a greater holistic oversight of teaching and learning issues from both an undergraduate and postgraduate perspective.
- Work in regard to Personal Development Planning (PDP) was progressing and would be piloted in two Colleges next session.
- In regard to the Quality Enhancement Themes, much activity had focused on the First Year Experience theme. Initiatives were being driven forward both institutionally and within Colleges, with a focus on areas including induction and the structure of the first year.
- The Scottish Funding Council had awarded funding over a four year period to take forward work in regard to the employability agenda. This money would be used by the Careers Service to work with Schools and Colleges to develop and embed employability in the curriculum.
- A survey of first year entrants had recently been conducted and data was currently being analysed.
- The University was also engaging with work in connection with the other Enhancement themes of Integrative Assessment and Research-Teaching linkages.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RETENTION

- 15.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching), in introducing the paper on Undergraduate Student Retention (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes), outlined the institutional importance of the need to address the problem of student retention. She highlighted the financial implications including loss of tuition fee income and potential claw back of teaching grant. She further emphasised the University's moral obligation to ensure that our students had an effective, successful experience at University.
- 15.2 She acknowledged that the issue was complex and that debate and action across all areas of the institution would be required. She noted that much discussion had already taken place in Schools and Colleges. A number of core areas for action had been identified already, as summarised below:
- Initial engagement with applicants and the need to ensure that they were well-informed about what they could expect from University.

- A need for better orientation/induction for students, including identification of ways to engender a better sense of belonging for students.
- A need for enhanced pastoral support for students.
- The value of high quality feedback for students on assessments, to enable students to monitor and gauge their performance from an early stage.

15.3 In opening up the paper for discussion, a number of general comments were raised, the main points of which are summarised below:-

- 'At risk' students should be drawn to the attention of their Adviser in a timely manner in order to enable intervention to be effective.
- The reasons for students' withdrawal were many and varied.
- There was a need to ensure that students were given appropriate and targeted information to ensure they were well prepared for their studies and that they had realistic expectations.
- The need for review of the role of Advisers of Studies and the possible introduction of a system of pastoral support through a Personal Tutor system.

15.4 The Vice-Principal also drew Senate's attention to the recommendation set out in the paper that successful completion of elements of formative assessment in first half-session level 1 and level 2 courses could be used to give students exemption from end-of-course summative examinations.

15.5 In discussion, a number of comments were raised in regard to this specific proposal, as summarised below:

- The proposal would largely benefit the more able students and not those normally perceived to be 'at risk';
- Formative assessment would be more open to plagiarism;
- Some more able students withdraw because they do not feel sufficiently engaged. Greater use of formative assessment might help to address this.
- Students might feel overloaded by additional formative assessment.
- Formative assessment could be beneficial if the feedback it provided could be used to guide students to better understand what was expected of them.
- The introduction of exempting formative assessments in the first half-session would simply move the problem of failure in examinations to the June diet.
- Enhanced feedback to students on assessments would be beneficial.
- The use of formative assessments to provide exemption from end-of-course assessments might be appropriate for some disciplines more than others. Schools therefore could be given the discretion to choose whether or not to use such formative assessments to give exemption from end-of-course assessments.
- Some courses already operated a system of exemption from end-of-course assessments.
- If formative assessments were to be used to give exemption, the 'formative' nature of such assessments might be lost.

15.6 Following this wide-ranging discussion, it was agreed that the specific proposal in regard to the use of formative assessment in first half-session level 1 and 2 courses to give exemption from end-of-course assessments should be reviewed and brought back to a future meeting of the Senate.

REPORTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT (12 December 2006 & 6 February 2007)

1. Progress of Resolution No 247 of 2006 [James Clerk Maxwell Chair of Mathematical Physics]

16.1 The Senate noted that the Court had approved Resolution No 247 of 2006 [James Clerk Maxwell Chair of Mathematical Physics] that had previously been approved by the Business Committee of the General Council and the Senate.

2. Progress of Resolution No 248 of 2006 [Regius Chair of Humanity]

16.2 The Senate noted that the Court had approved Resolution No 248 of 2006 [Regius Chair of Humanity] that had previously been approved by the Business Committee of the General Council and the Senate.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Invigilation

- 17.1 The Senate considered a proposal from the UCTL that individuals who were not academic staff be permitted to act as examination invigilator. Currently, the University required that examination invigilators be members of academic staff. The UCTL had agreed that it would be appropriate for the task of invigilation to be carried out by other categories of staff, provided appropriate training was available. Accordingly, the UCTL had agreed that the guidance on the appointment of invigilators for Heads of School, contained in the *Rules for the conduct of prescribed assessments and written examinations for degrees or diplomas*, should be amended to read:
- Invigilators would normally be members of Staff of the University. Where appropriate, Heads of School may opt to appoint other suitably qualified individuals to act as Invigilators of University Examinations.
- 17.2 One member of the Senate raised concern that the change proposed implied that the use of non academic staff to invigilate in June 2006 during the industrial action may not have adhered to existing policy. In response, it was noted that the current guidance permitted non academic staff to invigilate and that the proposed changes simply sought to make this possibility more explicit. This matter having been clarified, the Senate, for its part, approved the proposal,

2. Double marking at honours and postgraduate taught levels

- 17.3 The Senate considered a proposal that the University replace the requirement for full double-marking of all summative assessments taken as part of an Honours or Postgraduate Taught Programme with a system of moderated double-marking (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).
- 17.4 Concern was raised by one member of the Senate in regard to the proposed changes to the University's policy on double marking of summative assessments at Honours and Postgraduate levels. In presenting his concerns, he highlighted the following main issues:
- Whether the proposed scheme would lead to a significant reduction in marking load as compared to full double marking;
 - That any saving in marking load would be offset by an increase in administrative burdens.
 - The implication of the proposal was that all summative assessments, including coursework, must be subject to double marking which would have practical implications including delays in the timely return of marks to students.
- 17.5 In response the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) confirmed that the proposed system of moderation was brought forward in view of confidence in our standards of marking. She recognised that there would be administrative implications of the proposed system but emphasised that the proposal had been brought forward with the aim of reducing academic burden. She further confirmed that, as was currently the case, double marking of in-course summative assessments would be required where practicable. The proposed system of moderation would be a minimum standard and Schools could elect to retain full double marking. If approved, the UCTL would keep the system of moderation under close review.
- 17.6 It was agreed that, while there was general support for the proposal, the guidance in regard to the operation of the system to be included in the Academic Quality Handbook should be brought back to the next meeting of the Senate.

3. Regulatory Changes

- 17.7 The Senate approved, and agreed to forward to the University Court, the draft Resolution 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees' (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes)
- 17.8 The Senate approved, and agreed to forward to the University Court, the draft Resolution 'Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Bachelor of Arts in Youth Work with Applied Theology' (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes)

REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES

- 18.1 The Senate noted that the changes to the list of courses and programmes which were approved by the Academic Standards Committees at their recent meetings, could be accessed at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/report/>

TIMETABLE FOR ELECTION OF NON *EX OFFICIO* MEMBERS TO THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS AND OF SENATE ASSESSORS TO THE COURT AND JPFEC.

- 19.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had approved the following 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 JPFEC.

Election of non *ex officio* members of the Senate

Friday 23 February 2007	-	Issue of Nomination Forms to eligible staff
Wednesday 7 March 2007	-	Submission of Nominations to the University Secretary
Friday 9 March 2007	-	Issue of Voting Papers to eligible staff
Wednesday 21 March 2007	-	Submission of Voting Papers to University Secretary

The closing time for receipt of Nominations and Voting Papers would be 5pm.

Following approval by the University Court of the amending Ordinance, it was proposed that eligibility to propose candidates, stand and vote in the election be open to all academic and research staff of Grade 6 and above who were not members of Senate *ex officio*, **including Established Professors**, whose term of service would run from the date of approval of the new Ordinance by the Privy Council.

Election of Senate Assessors to the University Court

Friday 27 April 2007	-	Nomination Forms issued to relevant Senators
Wednesday 9 May 2007	-	Submission of Nominations to the University Secretary
Friday 11 May 2007	-	Issue of Voting Papers to eligible Senators
Wednesday 23 May 2007	-	Submission of Voting Papers to the University Secretary

The last time for receipt of Nomination Forms and Voting Papers would be 5pm.

Election of Senate Assessors to the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee

Friday 25 May 2007	-	Issue of Voting Papers to eligible Senators
Wednesday 6 June 2007	-	Submission of Voting Papers to the University Secretary

The closing time for receipt of Voting Papers would be 5pm.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE MUSEUMS, COLLECTIONS AND GALLERIES COMMITTEE

20. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had approved the appointment of Mrs W Pirie as a member of the Museums, Collections and Galleries Committee with immediate effect, *vice* Mr P Haley.

ORDINANCE ON USE OF SURPLUS ENDOWMENT REVENUE

21. The Senate noted that the Ordinance on the Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue was passed by HM in Council on 7 February 2007.

GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA*

- 22.1 The Senate noted that details of those qualified to receive degrees, diplomas and other awards who had applied to have them conferred *in absentia* could be viewed in the Registry (see appendix to Minutes of June 2007).
- 22.2 The Senate agreed to confer the degrees on, and award the diplomas and other qualifications to, the persons stated.