UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2007

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Houlihan, Macaslan, Gane, Haites, Rodger, MacGregor, Bruce, Macinnes, Killham, Jordan, Flin, Macdonald, Saunders, Beaumont, Ms M Pearson, Professors Hughes, Secombes, Dr P McGeorge, Professors Salmon, Cotter, Walkden, Duff, Black, Mordue, Dr P Edwards, Mr M Radford, Dr WF Long, Dr P Schlicke, Mrs L Stephen, Professor Burgess, Mrs W Pirie, Mr A Arthur, Dr D Molyneaux, Dr W McCausland, Mr W Brotherstone, Dr WG Naphy, Dr D Marsden, Dr J Schaper, Mrs R Fitzpatrick, Dr J Forbes, Mrs A Valyo, Dr S Lawrie, Dr J Stewart, Mrs M Ross, Mr S Styles, Dr A Arnason, Mr N Curtis, Dr A King, Professor Wallace, Dr J Sternberg, Dr I Greig, Dr A Jenkinson, Professor Lurie, Dr B Müller, Dr D Scott, Dr M Boroujerdi, Professor Liversidge, Dr T Macfarlane, Professor N'Dow, Dr A Schofield, Dr P Benson, Dr D Pearson, Professor Anderson, Dr W Harrison, Dr M Masson, Dr J Skakle, Dr S Townsend, Dr L Philip, Dr N Spedding, Mr J Hardy, Mr D Bernard, Mr O Lash-Williams, Mr J O'Neil, Mr S McMenemy, Mr S Ochola and Miss S Trofino.

Apologies: Professors Sleeman, Sharp, Webster, Dawson, Frost, Dr P Mealor, Dr P Fraser, Dr van Teijlingen, Dr H Wallace, Professor Levi and Dr S Bagaeen.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LAST MEETING

23.   The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2007 were approved

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL.

24.1   In opening the meeting, the Principal congratulated the new President of the Students' Association, Angela Fraser, and her team who had been recently elected for the coming academic year.

24.2   The Principal remined members that preparations for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) were now moving into the final stages and that a further update on the planned Curriculum Review would be brought to a future meeting.

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL'S MAIN GRANT LETTER 2007-08

25.1   The Senior Vice-Principal presented a summary of the implications of the Scottish Funding Council's Main Grant Letter for 2007/08. He informed members that this letter details the main grants for teaching and research allocated to Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In presenting this analysis, he highlighted the following main points:

- The total non-ring-fenced funding would be 6% (in 2006/07 the uplift was 10.6%) higher in cash terms than 2006/07. This would be the last year funded from the 2004 Spending Review settlement. In addition to the £25m embedded in these grants and the Knowledge Transfer grant for the costs of the human resource management modernisation in 2006/07, a further £5m had been included for 2007/08.
- There would also be changes to the allocation of resources for 2007/08 due to the introduction of a new widening access premium, changes to the allocation method for the disabled students' premium and changes to the preclinical/clinical funding split for dentistry.
- In terms of teaching funding, the main change for 2007/08 would be an alteration in the balance of funding distributed to HEIs from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Students Award Agency for Scotland (SAAS). This change had been made to reflect the implication of top up fees in England. In overall terms, taking an aggregate of tuition fee income and teaching grant, the University would receive an overall increase of 3.5%.
- The Scottish Executive had removed the cap on full-time home/EU undergraduate numbers in priority subjects, and had relaxed the cap for non-priority subjects. While this change in policy would not impact for 2007/08, it would impact on penalties to be applied for breach of consolidation in

2007/08 and might increase further market challenges in terms of recruitment in an already very competitive environment.

- There had been an increase from £5.7m to £10m in funding for the new Widening Access Premium, however, as a consequence of the methodology the University would only see 2.3% of this increase. Similarly, the Disabled Students Premium had increased by 8% across the sector with Aberdeen receiving a significant 31% increase.
- In terms of research funding, the total sector funding had increased by 8.5% with Aberdeen receiving a 10% uplift. Only Dundee and Edinburgh had received higher increases. This award was a significant achievement and reflected the University's success in increasing postgraduate research students numbers and knowledge transfer activities.
- There had been an increase in the main research grant. This increase was to reflect (i) the fact that medical charity funding does not attract full economic costing, and (ii) increases in the funding premium for units of assessment rated at 4, 5 and 6*.
- The Knowledge Transfer budget had increased to £19m and would include £0.5m to support cultural engagement activities.
- The Research Postgraduate Grant had increased by 10.6% to £25.7m for 2007/08. This increase would recognise, in part, increased student numbers and a change in funding methodology whereby funding would now be based on precise postgraduate research student numbers.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2007-2012

26.1 The Senior Vice-Principal presented the draft Strategic Plan for 2007-2010. In opening, he highlighted the different approach taken in developing the new Plan. Traditionally, the University Plan had been very much a compliance document written primarily to address the regulatory requirements of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). As such, the Plan had tended to be fairly operational and largely aligned to SFC priorities. In view of changes in the SFC's approach and changes in the way in which the University wishes to be perceived had led to a significant change in the Plan for 2007-2010. The aim of the revised Plan was to make it a high-level document which would represent the University's ambition, values and priorities. Targets had been included to identify the step-changes required to achieve our ambition.

26.2 In inviting debate on the draft Plan, the Senior Vice-Principal asked that members focus on the broad themes of the Plan and that they forward any detailed comments or textual amendments to the Director of Planning. He asked that members consider the following questions:

- Does the Plan reflect the ambition and aspirations of our community?
- Does the Plan have the correct balance between being high level and strategic and conveying the essence of what the University is?
- How does the Plan relate to the Curriculum Review?
- How does the Plan relate to research planning post RAE?

26.3 There followed a wide-ranging discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- The Learning section states that we shall 'ensure our research expertise influences and inspires our learning and teaching' and 'ensure that our staff have the necessary skills for teaching'. It was queried how the University would 'ensure' this happens without compulsory staff development? In response, it was noted that the University does have a range of structures and opportunities for staff development and that these are monitored through the appraisal process.
- The Plan does not make explicit reference to the centrality of learners within the University. It was agreed that consideration should be given to enhancing reference to the student experience.
- It was questioned whether sufficient emphasis was given to the role of the University in regard to cultural engagement both in terms of provision of cultural aspect of degrees and in terms of the University's role in cultural activities. It was agreed that consideration should be given to raising the profile of this aspect within the Plan.
- It was suggested that the Plan does not place sufficient emphasis on the retrospective achievements of the University in recent years. In response, it was noted that the accompanying Environmental Analysis document would address this issue.
- Concern was raised in regard to the development of Hillhead Student Village and the affordability and quality of student accommodation. In response, it was noted that the increase in accommodation charges had been made to reflect the realistic economic cost of such

accommodation and that the resulting increased income would be used to enhance existing facilities. The Plans for the development of Hillhead were being taken forward in discussion with the Students' Association. Looking to the future, engagement with a private sector provider would be the only cost-effective way to develop the site but plans in that regard were at a very early stage and would be taken forward with appropriate consultation.

- In the Learning section, the meaning of the statement 'provide an innovative education that produces graduates equipped with the relevant decision-making, analytical, entrepreneurial and sustainable skills' was questioned. In response, it was noted that these aspects refer to core transferable skills. In terms of the forthcoming curriculum review, it was noted that the debate would need to address the central qualities we wish our graduates to have and whether these skills should be taught through specific courses or integrated into the curriculum.

- In regard to the targets in the People section, it was questioned how the level of staff and student satisfaction would be monitored? In response, it was noted that at least one College is operating a staff satisfaction survey and that this would be further developed. Likewise the University has a range of ways to assess student satisfaction, including SCEF surveys, the recent survey of First Year Experience and participation in the National Student Survey.

- The aim behind inclusion of the target to reduce staff sickness by 30% cited in the People section was questioned. In particular, it was queried what measures would be used to achieve this target. In response, it was noted that this target reflects the University's obligation, as a caring employer, to improve the working environment and so improve staff absence due to work-related illness. It was agreed, however, that consideration would be given to the possible misleading message the inclusion of such a figure might portray.

- In regard to the Infrastructure section, it was noted that there was a strategic aim to replace all desktop PCs on a four year rolling programme but no mention made of a similar renewal programme for laboratory/scientific equipment. In response, it was noted that discussions were ongoing to identify ways to address this need for ongoing equipment renewal. It was further noted that the IT renewal would be campus-wide and would cover provision for both staff and students.

- The utility of targets within the plan was questioned and, in particular, whether the targets cited directly relate to the ambition of the University. In response it was noted that, the targets attempt to address areas in which it is felt Aberdeen should develop in order to achieve its ambition.

- Concern was raised in regard to the provision of textbooks within the library. In response, it was noted that there was a centrally set budget for textbooks but the use of this was at the discretion of academic Schools/disciplines.

- The need for a review of the University's website was highlighted.

- The role of the University in supporting families was highlighted. It was proposed that more could be done to emphasise this aspect through, for example, reference to the development of the Rocking Horse Nursery.

26.4 In drawing the debate to a close, the Senior Vice-Principal informed Senate that the final draft of the Plan would be brought to the June meeting of the Senate.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT
(20 March 2007)

1. Draft Resolution No of 2007
[Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees]

27.1 The Senate noted that the Court, had received the draft Resolution, from the Senate, and agreed to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

2. Draft Resolution No of 2007
[Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts in Theology (with CertHE and DipHE Options) and Bachelor of Arts in Youth Work with Applied Theology (with CertHE and DipHE Options)]

27.2 The Senate noted that the Court, had received the draft Resolution, from the Senate, and agreed to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

3. Ordinance No 138
[Amendment to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus

27.3   The Senate noted that the Court had approved the revised draft Ordinance and its formal submission to the Privy Council.

4. Ordinance No 137
[Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue]

27.4   The Senate noted that the Privy Council had approved Ordinance No 137 [Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue].

5. Strategic Plan 2007-2010

27.5   The Senate noted that the Court had been invited to consider the first draft institutional Strategic Plan 2007-2010.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Double marking at honours and postgraduate taught levels

28.1   The Senate, for its part, approved the proposal that the University adopt a system of moderated double marking for summative assessments at honours and postgraduate taught levels. This would, as a minimum, only require double marking of a selection of scripts.

2. Guidance Note on Placement Learning

28.2   The Senate, for its part, approved a Guidance Note on Placement Learning (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The guidance was intended to be a high-level statement which would be relevant to all sections of the University who made use of periods of placement learning. The guidance was based on the relevant section of the QAA Code of Practise and was the minimum required to ensure that the University was compliant with the Code. The Guidance note would be included in the Academic Quality Handbook as Appendix 6.1.

3. Approval of examination papers

28.3   The Senate noted that the UCTL had approved revisions to the guidance for schools (paragraph 7.3.3 of the Academic Quality Handbook) for the approval of examination papers following changes requested by external examiners. The changes had been made to clarify the circumstances under which examination papers were required to be returned to external examiners for further scrutiny: where all substantive changes requested by an external examiner had been incorporated into the paper, the paper could be ratified by the Head of School or their nominee.

28.4   The UCTL had approved a proposal to establish a central repository of the deadlines being used by schools for the submission of examination papers to external examiners in order that an awareness of the institutional position regarding examination preparations could be established. The UCTL had agreed that the central repository should be established in the Registry. The Registry would contact schools by email in October each year to remind them to submit details of deadlines.

4. Employability: Proposal re strategic funding for the University of Aberdeen

28.5   The Senate noted that the UCTL had noted that, further to submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) of the University's plan and proposed intended expenditure of the employability funding being made available by the SFC, the University's plans had been approved. The SFC had awarded the University in excess of £50,000 each year for a four year period to take forward its plans.

5. Higher Education Academy Annual Report 2005-2006

28.6   The Senate noted that the UCTL had noted the paper detailing the key points from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Annual Report for 2005 – 2006 together with the full institutional report for the University of Aberdeen.

AMENDMENT TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

29.   On the recommendation of the Senate Business Committee, the Senate, for its part, approved amendments to the composition of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE (POSTGRADUATE)

30.1   The Senate, for its part, approved, on the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the recommendation that the Faculty of Science and Technology, Orkney College, an academic partner of UHI Millennium Institute be validated under the terms of the accreditation agreement currently in force between the University and UHI to deliver the research degree programmes in the area of Agriculture: Agronomy.

30.2   The validation would remain in force for five years under the terms of the accreditation agreement between the University and UHI. The validation proposal was subject to the academic area meeting recommendations specified in the relevant report by a stipulated date. The report from the validation panel was available at: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/documents/UHI_Senate.doc

REPORT FROM THE JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE
(6 March 2007)

1   Student Population Planning for 2007/08

31.1   The Senate noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper on the 2006/07 student population (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) and approved admissions targets for entry in the academic year 2007/08.

2   Going Rates for Admission 2007/08

31.2   The Senate noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had approved the entry requirements for the BSc "Global Challenges" degree programmes, on the recommendation of the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee.

GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA*

32.1   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).

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