

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2008

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Houlihan, Ms C Macaslan, Professors Gane, Haites, MacGregor, Beaumont, Frost, Fynsk, Ditch, Salmon, Cotter, Walkden, Black, Dr B Connelly, Professors Long, Burgess, Mr A Arthur, Dr D Molyneaux, Dr W McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr B Marsden, Dr J Schaper, Mrs G Kirkpatrick, Dr P Mealor, Dr J Ravet, Mrs A Valyo, Dr A Gordon, Dr H Hutchison, Professor Saunders, Mrs M Ross, Dr A Arnason, Mr N Curtis, Dr A King, Dr E Baggs, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr P Fraser, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Young, D I Greig, Dr A Jenkinson, Professors Lurie, Shaw, Liversidge, Dr T MacFarlane, Dr G McNeill, Dr van Teijlingen, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr D Pearson, Dr P Jordan, Dr N Spedding, Professor Anderson, Dr W Harrison, Dr S Townsend, Dr R Wells, Professor Booth, Miss A Fraser, Miss S Dicks, Miss L Bruce and Miss S Sithamparanathan.

Apologies: Professor Rodger, Ms M Pearson, Professors Hughes, Secombes, McCaig, Duff, Hannaford, Dr P Schlicke, Dr D Hendry, Ms C Banks, Dr W Naphy, Mrs, R Fitzpatrick, Dr J Forbes, Dr A Campbell, Professors Heys, N'Dow, Dr E van Teijlingen, Dr H Wallace, Professors Deans, Price, Dr J Skakle and Professor Booth.

50. The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2008 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

51. In opening the meeting, the Principal drew members' attention to the launch of the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES) which had recently taken place. This was a joint initiative between the University and the Macaulay Institute. He also highlighted the recent success of the University's Rugby Team who had reached the final of the Scottish Rugby Union National Plate which was being held at Murrayfield.

SFC MAIN GRANT LETTER 2008/09

52. The Senior Vice-Principal gave a short presentation highlighting the main points of the recent Main Grant letter for 2008/09 which had recently been received from the Scottish Funding Council (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). He emphasised to the Senate that this year's settlement had been very tight across the Sector with an average increase in resources of 3.4%. The University had done better than average receiving a 4.4% uplift. He further emphasised that in light of the delay of the spending review announcement and need to avoid delaying the publication of the Funding Letter, the Cabinet Secretary had intimated that 2008/09 should be viewed as a year of consolidation and that therefore the information in the letter was restricted to priorities in the first year of the spending review period. Guidance on priorities for the remaining two years of the spending review period would be expected later in the year and would be informed by the work of the Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Universities. In terms of teaching funding, the University had received an overall uplift of 2.7%. The total funding for all grants research had increased by 5.9% with the University doing significantly better than average which a 10.4% uplift. He emphasised to the Senate that this was a significant achievement and reflected the University's success in increasing postgraduate research students, research grants and contract income together with knowledge transfer activities. In particular, he emphasised the Universities significant increase in knowledge transfer funding with the University having received a 16.4% increase and now receiving a grant of over £2.5 m.

THE CURRICULUM REFORM:

53.1 Professor MacGregor presented to the Senate the first Report from the Curriculum Reform Commission (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The Senate also received an update on the Curriculum Reform Project (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). Following this presentation he invited comment from the Senate, the main points of which are summarised below:

- The intellectual content of the proposed New Aberdeen Courses was discussed. It was noted that staff would be encouraged to come forward with their ideas for such courses within set parameters which would be agreed by the Commission. It was hoped that these courses would help to develop more rounded graduates. It was also noted that it would be important that the New Aberdeen Courses, while providing breadth, also provide a discipline link. It was further noted that, especially in the professional disciplines, it may be more relevant for the New Aberdeen Courses to be provided in the later years rather than in year one. This would allow students to have had the opportunity to gain the necessary subject background expertise before embarking on the New Aberdeen Courses. Comment was also made in regard to the impact of the New Aberdeen Courses on the discipline content in the lower years of study and it was questioned whether there would be implications for professional accreditation should the discipline content fall in the early years. In this regard, it was noted that no consultation had yet been carried out with Professional and Statutory Bodies.
- It was noted that one consequence of the move from a three to a four course structure in level one would be that not only would New Aberdeen Courses have to be developed but all existing level one courses would have to be reviewed to address their appropriateness in a four versus three course structure.
- It was queried whether it would have been more appropriate to have carried out market research at an earlier stage in the process. In response it was noted that it had been decided after discussion that it would be better for it to be carried out once some general principles had been established.
- In regard to the framework for provision, it was commented that this proposes more flexible route for entry and exit. It was queried whether it was anticipated that a student might be able to apply for entry to the full five year programme encompassing the four year honours and one year masters degree. In response, it was noted that it was not the current intention. It was, however, noted that the flexibility would mean that students would be given recognition should they drop out at early stages and that their re-entry to the programme would be a relatively straight forward process. It was further noted that progression from the fourth year of an honours programme to a Masters programme would have financial implications for students.
- It was commented that many programmes currently offered 30 credit rather than 15 credit courses, particularly in honours years, and it was queried how these would fit within the new proposed framework. In response, it was noted that such courses could continue, particularly at levels three and four, so long as there was sufficient flexibility maintained within the proposed new structure. It was however commented that this may cause further complication for joint honours degrees.
- It was noted that there is no assumption within the proposals that each course would have an examination. In response it was noted that the Commission had currently made no recommendations in regard to assessment strategies.
- It was queried whether the more explicit award of undergraduate awards of certificates and diplomas might encourage students to leave at early stages. It was queried whether this might lead to financial implications for the institution. In response it was noted that it was not expected that this would encourage students to leave before completing their degree rather it was intended to market such awards as a flexible approach to learning with hopefully the additional benefit of improving student retention.
- The value of the proposed awards of undergraduate certificate and diploma was queried. It was noted that it was already very easy for students to leave the university and it was queried whether the award of such certificates might confuse such students.

- It was further suggested that consideration should be given to the connectivity of the New Aberdeen Courses and the need to teach generic skills. It was suggested that it may be relevant to look at the skills agenda and how this might be pursued through the use of the New Aberdeen Courses using activities such as short written exercises and verbal presentations.

STUDENT INDUCTION AND RETENTION

54.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) gave a brief presentation of the main points in the outcome of the Survey of First Year Students (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) and the paper on Student Retention (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so she reminded Senate that the Survey paper was based on the output from an annual first year survey conducted just before Christmas and then again at the end of the Summer Term. This was the second year of the survey and trends were beginning to develop. She stressed that it would be important to continue with the survey to see the impact of such actions taken in regard to induction and retention. In regard to the paper on retention she noted that such discussions had been ongoing for some time. She emphasised to the Senate that there was a number of reasons why student retention was an important issue for the University. These included institutional commitment, reputation, the impact on student recruitment and the impact of league tables and the National Student Survey. Following her presentation, she invited the members of the Senate to discuss the issues raised and to endorse recommendations set out in the paper on student retention. There followed a wide ranging discussion the main points of which are summarised below:

- It was commented that a break down of the First Year Student Survey by degree intention would be helpful to Schools.
- It was queried whether in those Schools where there are already significant induction activities that a proposal for a pre-sessional induction day might not be required.
- The proposal for a formative assessment and feedback by the end of week six was queried. The principle underlying this recommendation was welcomed but it was suggested that it should not be so prescriptive. In particular, it was noted that this would have practical implications in large classes. In the School of Law, mock exams are provided in week 9 and it was noted that it would be difficult to provide additional formative assessment given the burden this would impose on staff. It was further queried why such formative assessment was required at level two.
- The feasibility of holding feedback interviews on a one to one basis for those who fail exams was queried. It was noted that this would be practically difficult in large classes where there may be 80 to 90 students failing exams. It was noted that in some Schools generic class feedback sessions are offered with students being given the opportunity for one to one feedback where they wish it. In response, it was noted that if more formative assessment were provided the number of students failing exams might not be so large. In response to this it was noted that formative assessment would not necessarily solve the problem as often there was an issue of lack of student engagement.
- The proposals for a more supportive approach to help student retention were welcomed. It was, however, commented that the retention issue may be associated directly with those entering university with low entry qualifications. In response, it was noted that it is possible to identify characteristics which would make a student more likely to drop out. Nevertheless, such students have made a commitment to come to university, the University has accepted them and we have a responsibility to support them.
- It was commented that in many courses student attendance is an issue and that in effect students are self selecting whether or not to attend. It was queried what support the University might give to encourage such students to attend. It was noted that local students often find it difficult to integrate into the University and therefore, while coming to University may be perceived as an easy choice for local students, it may in fact be quite a difficult one for many.

- It was noted that the University has a responsibility to ensure that students are given opportunity to achieve their full potential. It was commented that in some Schools students may not be being fully engaged in their studies as they for example receive only one piece of assessment work in week nine of the first term.
- The need for a 'home' for local students on campus was proposed.
- It was noted that the University has a diverse student intake and that it has a moral responsibility to meet the needs of this diverse population. In regard to the proposal for a pre-sessional induction for local students, it was noted that the Students' Association is already considering such a measure for the coming session. It was proposed that this be taken forward by the Students' Association in partnership with the University.
- The comment in the First Year Student Survey in regard to students' wishing more information about their courses and programmes was noted. It was, however, commented that students are frequently overwhelmed with information and that there may be a need to tailor such information more to student needs than is currently the case.
- It was noted that the University does not currently enforce attendance at lectures. It was proposed that there may be support for some requirement enforcing lecture attendance.
- It was suggested that a review of the timetable would be important given the comments provided in the First Year Survey.

54.2 In drawing the discussion to a close, the Principal noted that the Senate had agreed to the general trend of the recommendations set out in the document but that a few issues had been raised which would require discussion with relevant staff. It was agreed that the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) should take these matters away and bring back a revised paper to the next Senate for formal approval.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

1 Vice-Principals' Appointments

55.1 The Senate noted that the Court had approved the following:

- Professor Gane's designation to change from Vice-Principal (Library & Information Services) to Vice-Principal (Culture and Communities), with immediate effect.
- Professor Rodger, Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Physical Sciences, to be re-appointed for a further term of 3 years with effect from 1 August 2008.
- Professor MacGregor, Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Arts & Social Sciences to be appointed as Vice-Principal (Curriculum Reform) for a period of one year from 1 August 2008

55.2 The Senate noted that the Court had also noted that under the terms of the forthcoming merger of the University with the Rowett Research Institute the current Director of the Rowett Research Institute, Professor Peter Morgan, was to be appointed Vice-Principal from the date of merger for the duration of his appointment as Director of the Institute.

2 Items Referred to Court by the Senate

2.1 *Draft Resolution No of 2008 [Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees]*

56.1 The Senate noted that the Court had received the draft Resolution No of 2008 (Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees) from the Senate and had 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.

2.2 *Draft Resolution No of 2008 [Regulations for the Degree of Master of Physics (MPhys)].*

56.2 The Senate noted that the Court had received the draft Resolution No of 2008 [Regulations for the Degree of Master of Physics (MPhys)] from the Senate and had 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.

2.3 *Draft Resolution No of 2008 [Regulations for the Degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)]*

56.3 The Senate noted that the Court had received the draft Resolution No of 2008 [Regulations for the Degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)] from the Senate and had 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.

2.4 *Draft Resolution No of 2008 [General Regulations for Awards Conferred Jointly with other Degree Awarding Institutions]*

56.4 The Senate noted that the Court had received the draft Resolution No of 2008 [General Regulations for Awards Conferred Jointly with other Degree Awarding Institutions] from the Senate and had 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.

2.5 *Awards of Degrees Jointly with Other Institutions – Scottish Statutory Instrument*

56.5 The Senate noted that the Court, for its part, had approved the draft Scottish Statutory Instrument to enable the University to award degrees jointly with other institutions.

2.6 *Rectorial Election*

56.6 The Senate noted that the Court had approved a recommendation from the Senate, that nominations for election of a Rector close at 1.00pm on Thursday 24 April 2008, with a vote being taken on Thursday 8 May 2008.

2.7 *Partnership Agreement with UHI Millennium Institute*

56.7 The Senate noted that the Court, for its part, had approved a partnership agreement with UHI Millennium Institute

2.8 *Validation Agreement: UHI/Sustainability*

56.8 The Senate noted that the Court, for its part, had approved a proposal that the research area of Sustainability be validated under the terms of the accreditation agreement currently in force between the University and UHI to deliver research degree programmes.

2.9 *Annual Report from the University Committee on Teaching and Learning*

56.9 The Senate noted that the Court had noted that the 2006/07 Annual Report from the University Committee on Teaching and Learning was available on the Senate website.

REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

1. Report from University Committee on Teaching and Learning

57.1 The Senate approved, for its part, the recommendations of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning from its meeting 19 March 2008 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

2. Remit of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning and the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate)

57.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the Senate Business Committee, revisions to the remit of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning and the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) to move responsibility for all learning and teaching policy matters, both undergraduate and postgraduate, to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (copies filed with the principal).

3. Revisions to the Regulations for the Preparation and Submission of Postgraduate Theses

57.3 Following approval of the proposal that, with effect from 1 October 2008, it be mandatory for each postgraduate research student to submit one paper copy and one electronic copy of their sustained thesis, the Senate, for its part, approved the revisions to the Regulations for the Preparation and Submission of Postgraduate Theses. These revisions were approved, for its part, by the Information Strategy Committee at its meeting on 12 March 2008 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

4. Term dates 2008-2009

57.4 The Senate noted that the Committee had approved amended term dates for students for the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) and students in programme year 4 of the Degree of Bachelor of Science Combined with Education:

Winter Term Opens	Thursday 28 August 2008
Winter Term Closes	Friday 19 December 2008
Spring Term Opens	Monday 5 January 2009
Spring Term Closes	Friday 3 April 2009
Summer Term Opens	Monday 20 April 2009
Summer Term Closes	Friday 19 June 2009

5. Latest Date for the return of examination results, August 2008 diet of examinations.

57.5 The Senate noted that the Committee had approved amendments to the latest date for the return of examination results in August 2008:

Level 1 to 4 and undergraduate Level 5 courses by Wednesday 3 September 2008 (previously 27 August)

Postgraduate taught courses and programmes by Friday 24 October 2008 (previously 17 October)

REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE – COURSE AND PROGRAMME CHANGES

58. The Senate noted the changes to the list of courses and programmes approved by the Academic Standards Committee at their recent meetings, available at:
<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/report>.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE (04.03.2008)

1 Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees 2008/09

- 59.1 The Senate noted that the Committee had received and considered a paper on proposed 2008/09 Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees) and approved:

- The proposed fees for 2008/09.
- The recommendation that authority be delegated to the Senior Lay Member of Court and the Principal to approve proposals in relation to any additional fees for new programmes or changed assumptions about tuition fee income in the Main Grant Letter from the Funding Council, in order not to delay the publication of the 2008/09 fees.

- 59.2 Full details of the tuition fees approved for 2008/09 are available at
<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/tuitionfees/>

4. Graduations *In Absentia*

- 60.1 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 obtained from the Registry (see appendix to Minutes of June 2008).
- 60.2 The Senate agreed to confer the degrees on, and award the diplomas and other qualifications to the persons stated.

5. Dates of Senate Meetings

- 61.1 The Senate noted that meetings would be held at 2.00 p.m. on the following Wednesdays in the academic year 2008/09:

19 November 2008; 18 February 2009; 6 May 2009; 17 June 2009

- 61.2 The Senate further noted that a special meeting of the Senate would be held on Wednesday 29 October 2008 at 2.00 p.m. to discuss the final Report from the Curriculum Reform.