

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2011

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Houlihan, MacGregor, Morgan, Gane, Ross, Dr P Ziegler, Professors Stollery, Black, Secombes, Soulsby, O'Donoghue, Dr J Morrison, Professors Cotter, Walkden, Wallace, Nelson, Naphy, Dr B Connelly, Professor P Edwards, Dr J Geddes, Dr M Ehrenscheidtner, Mrs L Clark, Mr MJ Radford, Professor W F Long, Professor Hutchison, Dr J Lamb, Dr W D McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr B Marsden, Dr M Brown, Dr R O'Connor, Dr T Weber, Dr P Mealar, Dr D J Smith, Dr M Durham, Dr J Stewart, Professor Syrotinski, Dr T Wills, Dr T Burns, Dr A Pillai, Professor Duff, Mr S Styles, Dr P Bernhagen, Dr C W Haerpfer, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr X Lambin, Dr L Hastie, Dr M Young, Dr A Carrington, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Stansfield, Dr L P Erwig, Dr S Fielding, Dr J Francis, Ms K Harrild, Dr S Semple, Dr P Benson, Dr D Pearson, Dr D Martin, Dr S Duthie, Professor Chandler, Dr T Thevar, Dr L Philip, Dr M Reed, Dr J Skakle, Dr G Coghill, Mr R Parker, Miss M McHaney, Miss L Sivula, Miss K Kaushik, Miss J Paton, Mr A Gillinsky, and Mr E Pereira

Apologies: Professor McGeorge, Haites, Rodger, Crotty, Ingold, McCaig, McRae, Greaves, Pym, Grant, Dr D C Hendry, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr K Shennan, Dr D Hay, Ms C Banks, Mr A Arthur, Mr D C McMurtry, Mr C Munro, Dr D Robson, Mr N Curtis, Dr R Vij, Dr A D King, Professor Robinson, Dr A Jack, Dr I Greig, Dr J Pettit, Dr D Scott, Dr N Vargesson, Dr J Clelland, Dr A Denison, Professor C de Bari, Professor Heys, Dr H Galley, Professor Rogers, Dr G Shirriffs, Professor Smith, Dr H Wallace, Professor J Newton, Dr R Bull, Dr L Williams, Professors Guz, Watson, Professor Dobney, Dr D Jolley, Dr T Mighall, Dr R Wells, Professor C Grebogi, Dr T J F Norman, Professor Fynsk, Professors Robinson, Webster, Mr M Napier, Mr D McCroskie, Miss C Parashiuescu, Mr A Dean, Mr J Montiero, Mr R Samii and Miss L Bruce

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

30.1 The Principal drew to the attention of the Senate a proposed amendment to the minutes which had been submitted by Mr Arthur. The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2011 were approved subject to the changes proposed by Mr Arthur as detailed below:

23.4 One member of the Senate proposed to bring forward a motion that a paper detailing how the Framework would integrate with elements such as the Strategic Plan, **the promotion process, the appraisal process**, role profiles, and workload management should be brought to the next meeting.

23.4(a) The Senior Vice-Principal responded that he would bring a statement to Senate dealing with the issues raised by the Senator. In the light of this reassurance, the Senator withdrew the formal motion.

23.5 The Principal ~~responded~~ **stated** that, in regard to the timeframe for consultation, an indicative timeline had been provided. This would be reflected on in the light of the discussions. It was noted that if it was decided to take the paper to Court in March that a report would be brought back to the May Senate to account for the actions taken. If the Framework was not considered by Court in March, it would by definition be brought back to the May meeting. ~~The Senator proposing the motion outlined above in 23.4 indicated their acceptance of this reassurance.~~

- 30.2 In regard to the minutes, Mr Styles proposed that the names of those speaking at Senate meetings be identified in the minute. In response, the University Secretary commented that it was convention not to name individuals and that it can be difficult to always identify those speaking. It was agreed however to try using such a format but to keep it under review.

QUESTION FOR THE PRINCIPAL

- 31.1 The Principal drew Senator's attention to a question which had been received from Dr Bernhagen as outlined below:

Relations with autocratic regimes

In the pursuit of its academic activities, the University is constantly engaging with countries around the globe, including countries with autocratic regimes and poor human rights records. Against the background of the popular uprisings against autocratic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, and the involvement of Western governments in some of these developments, universities across the UK have come under increased scrutiny from the media concerning their dealings with non-democratic and/or illiberal regimes. As the University's actions have thus an ethical dimension as well as public visibility, there is a perception among some colleagues that these developments require the attention of Senate as well senior management. In particular, the following questions have been raised:

1. Does the University have a set of rules guiding its dealings with autocratic regimes?
 2. If not, is there a need for the formulation of such principles?
- 31.2 In response, the Principal informed the Senate that the University has no formal rules in regarding dealings with autocratic regimes. He however informed the Senate that the Research and Ethics Committee has responsibility for oversight of research and governance. In the context of fundraising donations, the Governance Committee has responsibility for approving any donations of over £1M and would err on the side of caution where it is felt that there may be any potential negative disadvantage. In terms of investments, the University has an Ethical Investment Policy and its governance is closely monitored by the Investments Committee. The Senate noted their acceptance of this response.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

- 32.1 The Principal updated the Senate on the political context in regard to higher education in Scotland. He informed the Senate that an expert group had produced a report on funding in Scotland as compared to that in England. This group was predicting a shortfall of £202M between the Scottish and English sectors in funding terms by 2015/16. This was based on charging of an average of £7.5K fees in England together with an ongoing inflationary increase. He further reported that politicians were suggesting on the basis of fees of £6.5K that there would be £90M gap. It was believed that a gap of this size could be met from efficiency savings without the need for fees to be charged in Scotland. The Principal noted that this commitment to free education in Scotland while a visionary one would only be achievable if the funding available to the sector supports this vision.
- 32.2 The Principal noted that there remained a lack of clarity in certain areas. These included:
- the implications of the funding gap in Scotland versus the English sector and the impact this would have in particular for the Ancient Universities;
 - SNP strategies in regard to charging EU students tuition fees;
 - Concern regarding expecting universities to meet the funding gap particularly when many English universities are similarly being required to meet efficiency savings;

- The length of the learner journey in Scotland and the funding and pastoral care issues associated with either increased direct entry into year 2 or transition into HE from S5.

- 32.3 The Principal noted that it was very likely that direct public funding would, at best, be flat in the medium future. In that regard he noted that this was a better position than in some other parts of the world. The Principal noted that the University was in a good position financially and thanked the Senate and the wider University community for their efforts in making efficiency savings. In this regard, he noted that, given the current funding position, there was no intention to implement another voluntary severance scheme given the staffing reductions achieved through the previous schemes.
- 32.4 Looking ahead, the Principal noted that it would be important to ensure that the University continues to deliver an excellent student experience. In that regard, he noted that he had had a number of excellent meetings with the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and the Director of Academic Affairs to discuss a range of proposed actions relating to teaching and learning and improving the student experience.
- 32.5 The Principal informed the Senate that it would be important in the future to look strategically at ways to diversify the funding base. In doing so, he noted for example that discussions were ongoing in regard to possible philanthropic sources of income and exploration of international opportunities for delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate provision.
- 32.6 He informed the Senate that in regard to research there had been some recent successes, giving us examples of grants from across the University, MRC funding secured by Professor Frenneaux in CLSM and Professor Stevenson who had secured funding from the Carnegie Trust. He further highlighted the increase in applications to the Principal's Interdisciplinary Fund and encouraged staff to continue to bring forward ideas.
- 32.7 The Principal further reminded the Senate that it would be important for the University to maintain its role as a cultural hub in the city and shire. In this regard, he noted that there were a number of activities to highlight including the Basketball Team's success at the British University & College Sports (BUCS) Championship, success by an Aberdeen student in the Scottish Student of the Year, Robin Parker's appointment as the President of NUS Scotland, the inclusion of Dr Paul Mealor's composition in the Royal Wedding ceremony and the opening of the new Museum on the King's campus.
- 32.8 In drawing to a close, the Principal noted that while there were financial uncertainties going forward, the University was in a financially sound position to face these. He further reminded the Senate that the recent work on the new Strategic Plan would provide a sound basis going forward. He noted that it would be important for the University to remain committed, dynamic and innovative going forward. In concluding, the Principal thanked Senate for all their work to date and he looked positively forward to working with colleagues going forward.
- 32.9 The Principal invited questions from the Senate. There followed a brief discussion, the main points of which are noted below:
- Ms McHaney sought reassurance that in the context of the wide range of priorities facing the University that the quality of teaching would be maintained. In response, it was noted that the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) was taking forward proposals to develop a formative methodology to enable staff to on their own teaching quality.
 - Professor Ross noted that an employer had commented that they like to employ Scottish graduates but had indicated that there is a perception that the funding differential between the Scottish and English sectors may lead to a difference in the quality of provision between the two sectors. In response, it was noted that it would important that the quality Scottish sector continues to increase and that it would be appropriate to lobby politicians in this regard.
 - Mr McCroskie questioned why it would not be appropriate to introduce a Graduate Tax. In response, the Principal commented that it would be important to ensure that some way is found to meet the funding gap between Scotland and England.

- Mr Parker commented in regard to widening participation that this should be at the heart of the Scottish university sector. In this regard, he noted that this was an area in which the University performs less well. He suggested it would be important to ensure that the adoption of a Graduate Tax would not inhibit the move to widen participation. He further noted that the impact of the recent staff losses from the University may be leading to increases in tutorial sizes and decreased contact time and cautioned against this. In response, the Principal noted the University's commitment to developing further scholarships to help support widening participation.

SFC MAIN GRANT LETTER 2011/12

- 33.1 The Senior Vice-Principal presented a brief update to the Senate on the SFC Main Grant Letter for 2011/12 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minute). He informed the Senate that the key features of the funding allocation were:
- A 10.9% cut in core grants for teaching from the general fund to institutions across the sector;
 - Protection in cash terms of the research budget, and in particular protection in real terms funding for the highest rated research;
 - The refocusing of funding in support of access and inclusion on a smaller number of institutions regarded as leading on working with disadvantaged groups; and
 - A significant reduction in capital funding of 38% from SFC, although the University's planning assumption was that no capital funding allocation would be made. Also in relation to capital, the letter announces a capital funding contribution of £8.6M from BIS across the Scottish sector, which was not expected.
- 33.2 Looking at University's allocation, he informed the Senate that the University had received a 9.8% decrease in core teaching grant. He stressed however that it was difficult to make year on year comparisons as the composition of the fund had changed over time. In regard to the research and knowledge transfer grants through the General and Horizon funds, he noted that the University had seen a 1.6% decrease but was still third in Scotland in terms of funding in this area. In terms of Horizon funding streams, he noted that there had been a change to the grants for widening access, retention and part-time incentive grants from £1M to £0.8M in the case of Aberdeen. This reduction reflected the refocusing of such funding to a limited set of institutions as outlined in 32.1 above. The funding provided for the Research Libraries Support grant and the Scottish Overseas Research Student Award Scheme (SORAS) was being phased out. In terms of capital funding, the University had received just under £2M and an equipment grant from BIS of approximately £600K. In drawing his presentation to a close, the Senior Vice-Principal noted that the settlement was for one-year only pending the election of the new Scottish Government.

UPDATE ON ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

- 34.1 The Senior Vice-Principal presented a paper giving an Update on Academic Expectations (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, he reminded the Senate that at their last meeting they had considered proposals for the introduction of a Framework for Academic Excellence. Following this meeting, he informed the Senate that a series of consultative meetings had been held with individual Schools. The feedback from these meetings had helped inform the further development of the proposals as a Framework of Academic Expectations. This feedback had included a number of broad themes including (i) the title of the Framework and in particular the term 'Academic Excellence', (ii) the potential for 'perverse incentives' associated with the use of a points system, (iii) the difficulty of taking account of teaching quality in such a Framework, and (iv) the linkage of this Framework to other management tools such as appraisal, promotion and performance management. In regard to the issue of teaching quality, he informed the Senate that the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) was developing a reflective tool to help staff to monitor their teaching

quality. He informed the Senate that the revised Framework had been formally adopted by the University Court at their meeting on 29 March 2011.

34.2 In drawing his introduction to a close, the Senior Vice-Principal invited comment from the Senate. There followed a wide-ranging discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- Professor Chandler commented that the use of the term 'unacceptable' within the Framework may be demoralising for staff. In response, the Senior Vice-Principal agreed to give consideration to alternative wording.
- Dr Brittain noted that colleagues had also raised concerns about the use of the term 'unacceptable'. In particular, he commented that the structure of the document could mean a member of staff could excel in most areas but be considered unacceptable in one area. He suggested that this would encourage staff to become generalists rather than specialists. He further queried the purpose of the Framework and whether it would be a tool for central management or rather for use by Heads of School and line managers. In response, it was noted that it would be the latter and that work would require to be done in regard to the alignment of the Framework to other management tools such as appraisal and promotions.
- Professor Walkden commented that the Framework would also serve a useful function as a self-reflective tool for individuals to help manage their own self-development.
- Dr Weber queried whether the Framework might be further revised once REF outcomes are known. In response, it was confirmed that the Framework could be tailored by Heads of School as appropriate.
- Dr O'Connor commented that while the revised document had addressed a number of concerns raised in regard to the initial draft, the Framework still discouraged the joint supervision of PGRs. In response, it was noted that the University requires more than one Supervisor and therefore the Framework should support this position. Professor Long further commented that the University's Regulations and Code of Practice were currently being revised in order to make explicit and give guidance on the QAA requirement that each research student may have a minimum of one main supervisor who is normally part of a supervisory team.
- Professor Cotter commented that the reduction in staffing numbers may mean that the 100 hour expectation in regard to teaching contact time might not be appropriate going forward. In response, it was noted that it may be necessary to adjust if this is not deliverable.
- Mr Parker commented that it would be important to consider how the Framework fits with wider University policies (e.g. the University's expectations in regard to PhD supervision). He further commented that, while the University has placed a focus on the importance of graduate attributes for students, it would be similarly important to consider encouraging self-reflection by staff in regard to their continuous professional development. In response, it was commented that the Strategic Plan places an emphasis on excellence in all areas and that it would be important to reflect on how to support staff in the pursuit of such excellence.
- Miss Kaushik commented that there can be significant variation in terms of contact hours between Schools. In response, the Head of the College of Arts & Social Sciences commented that School workload models would take account of such variations. In this regard, he noted that this further emphasised the importance of the Framework as a tool for Heads of School.
- Professor Duff commented that the revised document was a helpful tool and welcomed the consultative approach taken to its development.
- Professor O'Donoghue suggested in regard to the wording of the Framework that it might be appropriate to simply omit the category 'unacceptable' and use 'significantly below expectation' as the lowest category. He further queried the appropriateness of the low placing of Pg Coordinators on the scale. In regard to the timeline for the measure of research metrics, he commented that research awards were to be based on a 5 year period, whilst research output was to be from 2008 and PgR supervision was proposed to be a snapshot. In response, it was noted that the comment in regard to Pg Coordinators was helpful. In regard to timelines, it was noted that research awards were to be based on a 5 year rolling average, in terms of outputs these were focused on the next REF whilst PgR

numbers would be pulled centrally although it was noted that these may need interpreted depending on particular circumstances.

- Miss McHaney commented on the lack of inclusion of advising in the Framework given the central importance of academic and pastoral support in the University. In response, it was noted that it was planned to bring proposals in regard to advising to the June meeting of the Senate.
- Mr Parker queried who would oversee the further development and implementation of the Framework. In response it was noted that this would not be a negotiation issue, rather it would be taken forward by UMG and Colleges. The University Court in approving the Framework had acknowledged that it would be a work in progress. The Senate would not be asked to consider the Framework again.
- Dr Duthie commented that the Framework did not recognise the pastoral care provided to staff e.g. by those acting as mentors or mediators. She further commented that those serving as members of committees were also not recognised. In response it was noted that this was a helpful comment in regard to staff support. In regard to the list of duties, it was noted that it was not intended that the list be exhaustive.
- Dr Coghill commented that it would be helpful to provide some mechanism within the Framework to recognise the role of Heads of Discipline and other such roles without making the Framework too granular. In response it was noted that this would be for Heads of School to determine in using the Framework as a tool.

34.3 In drawing the debate to a close, the Senior Vice-Principal thanked the Senate for their comments and reminded the Senate that the document would be kept under review and as such he stressed that he would welcome feedback on its operation.

UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

35.1 The Senior Vice-Principal presented the Update on the Curriculum Reform (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In presenting the update, he drew member's attention to the work on determining the arrangements for Enhanced Study at Levels 3 and 4. He invited Professor Cotter to update the Senate on this work. She informed the Senate that while the principles had been established, this was still work in progress.

35.2 Dr Lamb questioned whether any progress had been made in regard to whether Enhanced Study courses taken as part of an Honours programme should count for the purposes of degree classification. Professor Cotter in responding stated that it was important to ensure such courses are taken seriously that they do count towards degree classification. As these courses would be at SCQF levels 10 and 11, it would be likely that they would require pre-requisites and would probably be linked to the cognate discipline.

35.3 The Principal informed the Senate that there continued to be interest across the UK in the University's Curriculum Reform project. He invited Professor MacGregor to update the Senate on this interest. Professor MacGregor informed the Senate that interest had been received from RSAMD, Queen's University in Belfast, the University of Southampton, the University of Warwick, the University of Limerick and Dublin City University. He further commented that in the wider sector interest had been received from HEFCE and the former Cabinet Secretary for Education. A Curriculum Innovation Network had been established by the Universities of Aberdeen and Southampton with a second meeting of the group being scheduled for September 2011 at Queen's University in Belfast.

35.4 In drawing the update to a close, the Principal also highlighted that the University had seen an increased interest in language courses which was contrary to the experiences elsewhere in the sector.

UCTL ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE

- 36.1 The Principal invited the Convener of the Quality Assurance Committee (in the absence of the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) to present the UCTL Annual Report to Senate for 2009/2010 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). He informed the Senate that the style of the report was different to that of previous years with a greater focus on the dissemination of good practice. He drew Senate's attention to the good practice highlighted in external examiner reports and informed the Senate that the report form was being modified to further encourage external examiners to highlight such good practice. He further informed the Senate that good practice drawn from Internal Teaching Reviews was being highlighted on the Centre for Learning & Teaching website. He also drew attention to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme and the projects being undertaken as part of this initiative.
- 36.2 Professor Long then drew the Senate's attention to the second part of the report which focused on a review of data in regard to academic appeals, academic discipline and student academic complaints for 2009/2010 and compared this to data from the two previous years. He reminded the Senate that a revised policy for dealing with academic appeals and student complaints had been approved by the Senate in February 2011 and that early feedback was suggesting that the new system had significantly improved the time by which such cases were being dealt with. He further stressed that changes made to the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum in regard to progression would, it was hoped, have a positive impact on the number of cases.
- 36.3 There being no questions in regard to the Report, the Senate noted their approval of the Report.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meeting on 29 March 2011, as under:

1. Draft Resolution No 142 (Employment) (Proposed Revisions to Statutory Instrument 1992 No 2704 (Model Employment Status))

- 37.1 The Court approved, for its part, the draft Resolution, and invited the Senate to pass the draft Resolution forthwith in accordance with the provisions of Section 6(2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

2. Draft Resolution No. of 2011 (Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees)

- 37.2 The Court drew to the Senate's attention that draft Resolution No. of 2011 (Changes in Regulations in Various Degrees) and agreed to forward it to the General Council to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

3. Validation Agreement with the International Christian College

- 37.3 The Court approved, on recommendation from the Senate, the Validation Agreement with the International Christian College in Glasgow for a period of five years from 1 April 2011.

4. Resolution No 265 of 2010 [The John Simpson Chair in Medical Education]

- 37.4 The Court noted that the Senate, for its part, had approved the draft Resolution No 265 of 2010 [The John Simpson Chair in Medical Education] and that in accordance with the provisions of Section 6(2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 had passed the draft Resolution forthwith.

5. Policy and Procedures on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

- 37.5 The Court noted that the Senate, for its part, had approved the now Policy and Procedures on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints and that they would be implemented with immediate effect. The Court separately approved the new Policy and Procedures.

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 24 March 2011, as under:

1. Return of Examination Results

- 38.1 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning noted the issues which had been encountered in meeting the deadlines for the return of examination results following the January examination diet. Following discussion, the Committee proposed that the requirement for External Examiners to physically sign-off paper mark sheets should be removed. The Committee recognized that the signing off of marks was the role of the Examiners' Meeting and that marks could be signed off by any two members of this Meeting, probably the Head of School and one other. It was agreed that changes should be made to the Academic Quality Handbook and that External Examiners should be informed of the change of policy.

2. Amendment to the Deadline for Class Certificate Refusal

- 38.2 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved an amendment to the deadline for notification to the Registry of the refusal of Class Certificates for the second half-session. The change was requested to take account of the amendments to teaching required as a result of the Royal Wedding Holiday. The new deadline will be: 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday 8 May.

3. Amendment to English Language Requirements for Entry to Postgraduate Study on Programmes in the College of Arts and Social Sciences

- 38.3 On the recommendation of the Postgraduate Committee, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved an amendment to the English Language requirements for entry to postgraduate study on programmes in the College of Arts and Social Sciences, to take effect from September 2012 entry.

UHI RESEARCH DEGREE VALIDATION: ENERGY ENGINEERING

- 39.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the Quality Assurance Committee that the UHI Millennium Institute academic area in Energy Engineering be validated under the terms of the accreditation agreement currently in force between the University and UHI to deliver the research degree programmes of MSc, Mphil and PhD.
- 39.2 The validation would be effective immediately and remain in force until 30 September 2016 under the terms of the accreditation agreement between the University and UHI. The revalidation proposal was subject to the academic area meeting recommendations specified in the relevant report by a stipulated date. The report from the validation panel is available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/>

SENATE APPOINTMENTS

40.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the following appointments:

- The appointment of Ms A-M Slater (vice Professor A Black) as member of the Hay of Seaton Committee.
- The appointment of Dr D McMurtry (vice Dr S Townsend) as the Senate representative on the Aberdeen Endowment Trust and the County of Banff Bursary Fund.