

## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## SENATUS ACADEMICUS

## Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2003

Present: Principal, Professors Sewel, Logan and Houlihan, Dr JG Roberts, Professors Rodger, Torrance and MacGregor, Ms C Macaslan, Professors Hubbock, Bruce, Baker, Jolliffe, Racey, Buckland, Sharp, Buckland, Gane, Jordan, Chandler, Bryden, Graham, Dawson, Logie, Player, Beaumont, Dunkley, Mitchell, Hunter and Secombes, Dr S Kunin, Ms M Ramsay, Dr AD Clarke, Professors Blaikie, Duff, Salmon, Saunders and Shucksmith, Dr P Benson, Mr WTC Brotherstone, Ms L Clark, Dr G Coghill, Dr IG Craw, Dr C Gray, Dr D Hay, Dr D Heddle, Dr PR Kinnear, Dr J MacDowall, Ms D McKenzie Skene, Dr MR Masson, Dr A Memon, Dr JG Ollason, Mrs ML Ross, Dr H Sinclair, Mr SC Styles, Dr C Thomson, Dr SP Townsend, Mr D Cockburn, Mr K Dunphy, Mr M Raith, Ms D White with Ms J Duncan in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Professors Mordue, Templeton, Urwin, Forte, Webster, Little, Flin and Simpson, Ms R Buchan, Dr J Murdoch, Dr WF Long, Mrs L Stephen, Mr I Stefanov, Professors Archbold, Lurie, Reid and Swanson, Dr M Holmes, Mrs B Hookey, Dr J King, Dr WD McCausland, Dr H McKenzie, Dr M Syrotinski and Dr HM Wallace.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

706. The minutes of the meeting of 29 January 2003 were approved.

**STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL**

707.1 The Principal informed Senate of the reasons behind the recent decision of the University of Aberdeen and The Robert Gordon University not to proceed with merger discussions. Significant external variables had recently emerged which needed to be taken into consideration, the most notable being uncertainties concerning the impact for Scottish Higher Education of the Government's White Paper, as discussed at the last Senate. In the apparent absence of any overwhelming financial argument in favour of continuing the process, the two Universities had decided that merger at the present time would not be in the interests of either University and had therefore agreed to end the merger discussions.

707.2 The Principal indicated that he was deeply proud of the ways in which staff had engaged in the discussions and he believed that the quality of the various analyses had been excellent. He therefore expressed his thanks to everyone who had been involved in the merger discussions. He said he had always been committed to exploring the hypothesis of merger, but not to a particular outcome, and believed that colleagues had worked collegially and dispassionately on this process.

707.3 The Principal said that he was disappointed in the decision only to the extent that merger, which had been one possible approach to strengthening the University's quality, would not be the route to doing so. The question was what alternative modes could be applied. One outcome of the Government's White Paper was likely to be a radical change in the shape of UK Higher Education, with institutions becoming much more competitive, particularly for research funding. The objective for the University, of being in the top 20 of UK Universities, had not changed. A great deal of progress towards this target had already been achieved, in an incremental manner, but this would not be sufficient in the new environment that was emerging. However, the Principal believed that the University was well positioned to focus on achieving its goals through the detailed analyses of costed academic plans that had been ongoing for some months. Many people had been involved in developing and considering the academic plans, which had resulted in a much more transparent process, with the quality of the work being extremely high in many cases.

707.4 The Principal believed that, while the Research Assessment Exercise was not a perfect indicator or the only indicator of the intellectual strength and health of an institution, it was nevertheless probably the best indicator available given that it was a peer review exercise and in view of the importance attached to it by the funding councils. The Principal had concluded, from reading all of the costed academic plans, that during the next few months the University must plan to raise the standard of most areas of research to the level of RAE5/5\* level, while identifying those areas of excellent research where this threshold could be exceeded.

707.5 In the wide-ranging discussion that followed, concern was expressed at the prominence being given to the RAE within UK Higher Education and the influence it was having on the positioning of individual institutions in regard to their missions and the research that they would undertake in the future. The Principal recognised these concerns, but argued, as did others, that we had no alternative but to do our very best in the RAE. It was also acknowledged that teaching and research were mutually supportive and that academic plans should take this into consideration.

### **CONSULTATION ON DEVELOPMENT OF THRESHOLD STANDARDS FOR RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES**

708.1 In introducing the paper that had been circulated, Professor Houlihan drew Senate's attention to the key questions on which responses had been sought in regard to the consultation document on the Development of Threshold Standards for Research Degree Programmes. He had drafted a response to these questions, after wide consultation with the academic community, including the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) and the Committee for Research, Income Generation & Commercialisation.

708.2 Broad support for the draft response was given during the discussion that followed. However, Professor Houlihan agreed to revise the draft response to reflect the view that institutions should be left to determine whether or not main supervisors in particular disciplines should be restricted to supervising a maximum number of students and, if so, whether that maximum should be variable between disciplines and should relate to the year of study of individual students, to take account of the varying demands of research students between each year of their studies.

708.3 In closing the discussion, Senators were asked to email Professor Houlihan with any other comments so that the University Management Group could approve the draft response on behalf of the Senate.

### **REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

**(11 February 2003)**

709.1 The Senate noted the following actions taken by the University Court:

#### **1. Resolution No. 229 of 2003**

**[Chair of Public Health]**

709.2 The Court, after consultation with the Senatus Academicus, approved Resolution No. 229 of 2003 [Chair of Public Health].

#### **2. Draft Resolution No of 2003**

**[Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees]**

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

## REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

(7 February 2003)

### 1. Degree Examination Statistics

711.1 Following discussion at the Senate on 29 January 2003, proposals that had been agreed by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) on 13 December 2002 in regard to monitoring degree examination statistics were referred back to the UCTL for further consideration (Senate minute 693 refers). The UCTL, having discussed the issues raised at the Senate, nevertheless agreed that the Senate be asked to endorse its original proposals while acknowledging that the procedures could be further revised in future if required.

711.2 Following further discussion of this issue, the Senate agreed that the UCTL proposals should not be endorsed. It was agreed that the UCTL be asked to address the issue of monitoring degree examination statistics through the Course Review procedures, whereby Course Co-ordinators should be required to comment on student performance in their courses in their annual reports to their Head of School/Department.

### 2. Guidelines for Good Research Practice

712.1 The Senate noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), at its meeting on 6 December 2002, had agreed revisions to the *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students* and to the *Postgraduate Structured Management Frameworks* in the light of the *University Guidelines on Good Research Practice* approved by Senate on 20 November 2002. These revisions had been made to ensure that both these documents included reference to the *Guidelines* and to ensure that, at appropriate points in their programme of study, students were made aware of the *Guidelines on Good Research Practice*. The revisions had been approved by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.

712.2 The Senate approved the addition of the following words under the list of responsibilities for Research Students in the *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students*: 'ensure that they have understood the University's Guidelines on Good Research Practice'.

### 3. Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

713. The Senate noted that the UCTL had considered a document summarising the main features of the draft Handbook for Enhancement-led Institutional Review: Scotland which had been published by the QAA for consultation. The document had also been considered by QUEST at its meeting on 30 January 2003. In discussion, the UCTL had agreed that the Handbook did not raise anything unexpected or overtly controversial. A response to the consultation was being drafted and would be submitted to QAA by the deadline of 28 February 2003. A copy of the draft Handbook could be accessed at: [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/scottish\\_hbook/scottish\\_hbook\\_home.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/scottish_hbook/scottish_hbook_home.htm)

### 4. Degree Examinations on Saturdays and Evenings

714. The Senate noted that the UCTL had considered a request from a Head of Department for a review of the policy on degree examinations on Saturdays and evenings following concern at the impact on students and staff of holding examinations at these times. In discussion, the UCTL had noted that the Senate's decision to hold examinations on Saturdays and evenings had been made for logistical reasons and that unless the Senate policy that students should have no more than two examinations on any day was to be revised, the only way in which the concerns could be addressed would be by extending the examination period: this could only be achieved by

lengthening the Academic Year, abolishing the revision period or by reducing the revision period. The UCTL had agreed that these possibilities were either not practicable or not desirable and had therefore agreed to reaffirm the existing Senate policy.

#### **5. Use of C & IT - Systems Continuity during Closed Periods**

715. The Senate noted that the UCTL had received a paper from the Director of DISS setting out the background to the problems that had occurred over the Christmas period when there had been a break in computer systems and setting out proposals as to how this could be prevented in the future. The UCTL had noted that the Information Management Committee had also considered this paper. Following discussion, the UCTL agreed to endorse the statement that the pursuit of normal University business required support to key computer functions to be provided beyond the current hours of cover and to support the proposed course of action to ensure this was achieved.

#### **6. Careers Education, Information and Guidance in**

##### **Higher Education in Scotland: SHEFC Consultation Paper**

716. The Senate noted that the UCTL had received a copy of the consultation paper from SHEFC in regard to Careers Education, Information and Guidance in Higher Education in Scotland. A number of points had been raised in discussion of the document. These would be taken forward and incorporated in the University's response, which was to be drafted by the Head of the Careers and Appointments Service and would be considered by UMG before being sent to SHEFC.

#### **7. Circulation of Committee Papers**

717.1. The Senate noted that a Head of School had proposed that it would be good practice if Heads of School could be given the opportunity to comment on proposals in regard to revisions to policies and procedures being considered by the UCTL in advance of the discussion of these proposals by the UCTL.

717.2 The UCTL agreed that the agenda and copies of any proposals in regard to revisions to policies and procedures that it was to consider should be circulated by e-mail to Heads of School in the Faculties of Arts & Divinity, Social Sciences & Law and Science & Engineering and to Heads of Department in the Faculties of Education and Medicine & Medical Sciences one week in advance of the date of the meeting. Heads of School/Department would be invited to feed any comments they would wish to make to their Dean in order that these points could be brought to the attention of the Committee at the meeting.

#### **8. Monitoring Students' Progress**

718. The Senate noted that, following a review of the system for monitoring students' progress (Senate minute 703 refers), a Guidance Note setting out the revisions to the system for the second half-session had been circulated to Heads of School/Department, Advisers of Studies and to Course Co-ordinators. A copy of the Guidance Note could be accessed at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/monitoring.hti>

#### **9. Examination Results via Portals**

719.1 The Senate noted that, with effect from January 2003, students would no longer routinely be sent a hard-copy results letter, but would be able to access their examination results via Student Portals. Students wishing to receive a hard-copy of their results could, however, request this from Registry Services. Certain categories of student (e.g. external candidates and Postgraduate Research students who did not have access to Portals) would continue to be sent results letters in hard-copy.

719.2 In regard to the deadline for submission of appeals against examination results, students were currently given 14 days from the date of their results letter to submit an appeal. However, as students could access their results on Portals the day after they were entered into the student record, it was more difficult to determine the date which should be used to set the deadline for submission of appeals. Following discussion, the Convener of the UCTL had agreed that academic appeals should be lodged with the Academic Registrar within 15 days of the Senate agreed deadline for return of examination results to the Registry or 15 days after a result had been entered in the student record, whichever was the later.

## **REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

### **1. Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and**

#### **Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB)**

720.1 The Senate approved recommendations by the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Medicine) that amendments be made to the Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, as under:

##### Regulation 6

In the existing Regulation, for 'Schedule of Courses' substitute 'Schedule of Prescribed Degree Assessments'.

##### Regulation 7

In the existing Regulation, for 'Schedule of Courses' substitute 'Schedule of Prescribed Degree Assessments'.

##### Regulation 10 (ii)

In the existing Regulation, for 'period' substitute 'Phase'.

The Senate also agreed that the University Court should be asked to incorporate these changes in the Resolution 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees', the draft text of which was currently before the Business Committee of the General Council.

### **2. New and Discontinued Courses and Programmes**

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

#### **(A) INDIVIDUAL DEGREE AND DIPLOMA COURSES (UNDERGRADUATE)**

**Engineering**

Introduction of new level 3 courses in Engineering Analysis and Methods 1 A, Engineering Analysis and Methods 1 B, Engineering Design (BScEng).

**(B) UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE AND DEGREE PROGRAMMES****KEY Learning Opportunities**

Introduction of new Certificate in Pre-Medical Studies

**Degree of BSc**

Revalidation of existing BSc programme in Tropical Environmental Science

**(C) POSTGRADUATE COURSES****Law**

Introduction of a new level 5 course in Intellectual Property by Distance Learning.

**MEMBERSHIP OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

722. The Senate approved the appointment of Dr J Morrison as a member of the Academic Standards Committee (Arts & Social Sciences, Education, Divinity and Law) with immediate effect until 30 September 2005, *vice* Dr D Ditchburn, on the recommendation of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity.

**MEMBERSHIP OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE**

723. The Senate approved the appointment of Mrs A Hendry as a member of the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Education) with immediate effect, to fill an existing vacancy, on the recommendation of the Dean of the Faculty of Education.

**ELECTION OF READERS AND LECTURERS TO THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS  
2002-2006**

724. The Senate approved the following timetable for a by-election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus for 2002-2006:-

Wednesday 05 March 2003 Issue of Nomination Papers to all Electors

Friday 14 March 2003 at 5.00 p.m. Close of receipt of Nominations by the Secretary

Monday 17 March 2003 Issue of Voting Papers to all Electors

Friday 28 March 2003 at 5.00 p.m. Close of receipt of Voting Papers by the Secretary

In accordance with the Schedule to University Court Ordinance No. 111, the Constituency in which staff would be eligible to propose, stand and vote was the Faculty to which their Department or School had been assigned by the University Court. The number of vacancies in each constituency was as follows:-

(a) Arts & Divinity - 1 until 30 September 2004

(b) Education - 1 until 30 September 2006

(c) Medicine & Medical Sciences (full-time) - 2 until 30 September 2006

(d) Medicine & Medical Sciences (part-time) - 2 until 30 September 2006

and 1 until 30 September 2004

(e) Science & Engineering - 3 until 30 September 2006

(f) Social Sciences & Law - 2 until 30 September 2004

### **ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSORS TO THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

725. The Senate approved the following timetable for the election of Senate Assessors to the University Court from 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2007 *vice* Professors Torrance and Graham and Dr PR Kinnear. At least one of those elected must be a non-professorial member of the Senate:-

Friday 18 April 2003 Issue of Nomination Papers to all Electors

Wednesday 30 April 2003 at 5.00 p.m. Close of receipt of Nominations by the Secretary

Friday 2 May 2003 Issue of Voting Papers to all Electors

Wednesday 14 May 2003 at 5.00 p.m. Close of receipt of Voting Papers by the Secretary

### **ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSOR TO THE JOINT PLANNING,**

#### **FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE**

726. The Senate approved the following timetable for the election of a Senate Assessor to the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee *vice* Professor Graham from among the Senate Assessors to the University Court not otherwise members of the Committee. (This may include those elected or re-elected under Minute 725 above.):-

Friday 16 May 2003 Issue of Nomination Papers to all Electors

Wednesday 28 May 2003 at 5.00 p.m. Close of receipt of Nominations by the Secretary

Friday 30 May 2003 Issue of Voting Papers to all Electors

Wednesday 11 June 2003 at 5.00 p.m. Close of receipt of Voting Papers by the Secretary

### **GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA***

727.1 The Senate noted that a list of those qualified to receive degrees and diplomas who had applied to have them conferred *in absentia* could be obtained from the Senate Office of the Registry. [See Appendix to Minutes of June 2003].

727.2 The Senate conferred the degrees on, and awarded the diplomas and other qualifications to, the persons stated.