

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2012

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Haites, Hannaford, Houlihan, McGeorge, Morgan, Rodger, Wallace, Greaves, MacGregor, Ross and Crotty, Mrs L Clark, Professors Baggs, Skakle and Soulsby, Dr J Morrison, Dr R Wells, Professor Schaper and Naphy, Dr B Connolly, Dr J Masthoff, Mr M Radford, Dr S Lawrie, Mrs J Bruce, Dr M Ehrenschtendner, Ms C Banks, Professor Hutchison, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr M Brown, Dr R O'Connor, Dr T Weber, Mr McMurtry, Dr DJ Smith, Dr M Durham, Dr J Stewart, Professor Syrotinski, Dr T Wills, Dr T Burns, Dr A Pillai, Mr S Styles, Dr P Bernhagen, Mr N Curtis, Professor Haerpfel, Dr AD King, Professor Lambin, Dr L Hastie, Professor Robinson, Dr A Jack, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Greig, Dr N Vargesson, Dr I Stansfield, Dr S Fielding, Professors Francis and Galley, Ms K Harrild, Professor Newton, Dr S Semple, Dr D Pearson, Dr D Martin, Dr L Williams, Professor H Chandler, Professor Guz, Dr D Jolley, Dr T Mighall, Dr L Philip, Professors Grebogi, Norman and Coghill, Miss T Birley, Miss J Bjorkqvist, Miss L Sivula, Mr H Grieve, Miss F Johansson, Miss K Kaushik, Miss J Paton, Miss R Munday, Mr P Bond, Mr J Douglas, Mr A Khan, Mr L Butler Perks and Mr T Majchrowski

Apologies: Mr S Cannon, Professor Paterson, Dr Ziegler, Professors Zalewski, Buckland, McCaig, Macrae, Reid and O'Donoghue, Dr S Davies, Professors Gow and Nelson, Dr D Hendry, Professor Sir Ritchie, Dr K Shennan, Dr C Brittain, Dr B Marsden, Professor Mealar, Mr C Munro, Dr D Robson, Professor Duff, Dr R Vij, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr A Carrington, Dr J Pettitt, Dr D Scott, Dr J Cleland, Dr A Denison, Professors de Bari and Heys, Dr LP Erwig, Professor Rogers, Dr G Shirriffs, Dr H Wallace, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr S Duthie, Dr T Thevar, Professors Watson, Dobney, Dr M Reed, Professors Webster and Edwards, Mr M Fortune, Mr J Filous, Mr N Marley, Mr A Denham, Mr S Johnson,

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 14.1 The Senate approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2011.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

- 15.1 The Principal updated the Senate on events since the last meeting. It was reported that in response to a request for the University's position on the Referendum on Scottish Independence, he was of the view that the University should not have a position, as was the case with other political debates. The University should be a safe place for debate on issues that affect higher education and society as a whole, and therefore should not have an opinion of its own. The Principal then reported that following the UK Government's decision to shelve the HE Bill for this session, there would be no impact at this point. However, even if there were to be little direct impact on funding in Scotland, any future move to regulation in the rest of the UK, and especially in relation to private provision, may have an impact and therefore warranted close observation. The Principal reported that the Innovation Strategy from Westminster was helpful for the University as it moved funding away from narrow areas in which we do not have interests into a far broader remit where we do. Finally, the Principal reported he was very positive about progress in teaching and learning within the University, having just attended the Good Practice Fair. He was particularly impressed with the work being achieved on Sixth Century Courses, as evidenced by the outstanding project posters presented by the students.

PRESENTATION ON LIBRARY USAGE

- 16.1 The University Librarian presented an update on progress with opening the remaining sections of the new University Library and reported on the increase in library usage since the official opening of the Library on 12 September 2011. The PowerPoint slides of the Library Presentation are filed with the principal copy of the minutes.

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN SCOTLAND

- 17.1 The Principal led a discussion on the Report on the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland. He reported that it was not yet clear how the Scottish Government will take the Review forward for legislation.
- 17.2 The Principal then led the Senate through the points of the Report asking for any questions or comments on each section, the main points of which are summarized below:
- Regarding the proposal to replace the Privy Council, it was commented that apart from being somewhat old-fashioned, it did not need replacing as it was effective in its remit.
 - Regarding the proposal that there should be one new statute for all Scottish universities, it was commented that given the various ways in which Scottish universities have been established and that existing statutes differ considerably, this was seen to be too complex to implement.
 - Regarding the issue of academic freedom, it was commented that although academic freedom in relation to being free to hold and express an opinion was desirable, extending or relating that freedom to any form of tenure was not.
 - Regarding the issue of collaboration, this was considered to be desirable and a welcome part of the report.
 - Regarding the proposal of an Advisory Forum, it was commented that there was not enough detail to determine whether or not this might work.
 - Regarding the relationship with further education, this was considered to be desirable and a welcome part of the report.
 - There were no comments regarding the appointment of principals and senior staff, nor on the abolishing of bonuses.
 - Regarding the issue around the election of chairs of governing bodies, it was noted that views were split but that by not having the Rector in the Chair would allow greater opportunity to act as an advocate for students. It was considered that this needed to be debated by the Student Council.
 - Regarding remuneration of the chair of the governing body, it was commented that this would be acceptable as long as the amount were relative to the role and not excessive.
 - Regarding the membership of governing bodies and the proposal that there should be an increase in the number of lay persons on such bodies, it was commented that this would increase the size overall and input from vice-principals would be lost. It was also commented that while the role of lay members was seen to be important, the importance of and input from academics and students should not be reduced.
 - Regarding the size of Senate, it was commented that this was not significantly out of line with that existing at the University, as it would have to be reduced by only 20 in number, and its composition would not alter.
 - There were no comments on training or on whistle blowing.
 - On the issue of improving and increasing the body of evidence-based research on higher education in the UK, it was commented that this was not seen to be an accurate view as it was considered that there was a good body of existing research on UK higher education, though not necessarily in the field of education but rather in the social sciences.

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL: FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR 2012/13

- 18.1 The Senior Vice-Principal updated the Senate on the Scottish Funding Council: Funding Allocation for 2012/13. Taking the Senate through the main points of the allocation, it was reported that funding for RUK students was being reduced; the teaching grant was being restored and, indeed, uplifted; that extra student places were being granted based on the outcome of the Research Excellence Framework; and that the research grant had been increased by £10M to be spread across institutions. In addition, it was reported that a model for easy-access to intellectual property (IP) was to be established whereby universities would be required to give IP for free or a minimal cost if that IP could not be exploited or was not wanted by the university.
- 18.2 Overall, there would be a £4.5M increase in funding to the University. For teaching and learning there would be a £3.1M reduction for RUK students and a £3.4 increase for other students. For research, the total research grant was increased by ~£1M. Two-star research would no longer be supported and the balance of funding for four-star to three-star would be three-to-one. Funding for postgraduate research was increased by ~£500,000.

18.3 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarized below:

- It was asked whether the reduction in funding for RUK students would mean capping RUK numbers. It was clarified that this was not the case and that the University needed to recruit at least 4500 RUK students to reach its target income.
- It was also asked whether in reducing funding for RUK students, the professional contribution of RUK students to the Scottish economy after graduation had been considered. In response the Senior Vice-Principal said that this was not the case as Scottish universities could not be prescriptive as to where graduates obtained employment.
- It was commented that the easy-access IP model could prove disastrous especially as the cost was minimal. The Senior Vice-Principal clarified that universities would be given a period of 2 years to exploit the IP, and only after this time-period could other organizations put in a request for transfer of the IP.
- It was asked whether, as a result of the increase in postgraduate research funding, the proposed skills training would be implemented. The Vice-Principal responded by saying that the skills training was to be implemented anyway and much of it was beginning to be rolled out.

UPDATE ON RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

- 19.1 The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) updated the Senate on Research Excellence Framework (REF). It was reported that the University had drafted its 'Code of Practice for the Selection of Staff', which needed to be submitted to the REF team for approval in April.
- 19.2 The Vice-Principal reported that the University was now in the process of holding a number of internal review meetings to look at the preliminary submissions in order to determine where people might be submitted. It was reported that as a number of units of assessment had changed, the University needed to be determined how this affected our submission. It was emphasized that at this stage no decisions had been made about who will be submitted, rather the focus was where people would be submitted if deemed eligible. This would also affect the number of impact case studies that would be required for each unit of assessment. It was hoped that decisions about which units of assessment we will submit to will be completed by the end of February.
- 19.3 Over the next 2 months the University would be focusing on the impact case studies, with a visit from Glasgow University who took part in the REF impact pilot, and the delivery of impact workshops by the University of Aberdeen. In September, it was planned to conduct a comprehensive review of the draft submissions in relation to each unit of assessment.
- 19.4 No questions followed.

ADMISSIONS REPORT

- 20.1 The Vice-Principal (Internationalisation) presented the Admissions Report (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). It was reported that the undergraduate figures for 2012 admission were the highest they had ever been at 18,250, more than 150 higher than last year. Generally the Scottish numbers had increased, EU remained the same and there had been a decline in RUK by 600 to 3147, the target figure being 450. Effort is now being concentrated on converting RUK applications to acceptances.
- 20.2 It was then reported that figures for postgraduate research were good with a target of 1000 FTE, 50% international, though those for postgraduate taught (PGT) were poor. A great amount of work was being put into targeted international PGT recruitment.
- 20.3 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarized below:
- It was asked whether the 5-year MEng fee would be based on the same principle as the 4-year degree fee. The Vice-Principal responded to confirm that it would, with the 5-year MEng costing the same as the 4-year degree.
 - It was asked whether there would be any relaxing of entry requirements for RUK students in order to achieve the required numbers. The Vice Principal responded to clarify that as the number of applications was good, this was unlikely and a position we hope to avoid. But the University did

need to improve its conversion to acceptance rates. Fees and entry requirements were set in consideration of the competition, some universities being better at recruiting, some better at conversion.

- It was asked whether scholarships for RUK students would be affected by the diversion of funds from RUK students. The Vice-Principal reported that this would not happen as the University had already set aside funds for the scholarships and bursaries for self-funded students.

STUDENT SURVEYS

- 21.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) updated the Senate on plans for institutional student surveys and the 2012 National Student Survey (NSS) reporting that the NSS survey was just about to open for this year and that the University was working with the Students' Association to encourage as many as possible to participate. It was evident from student feedback that students were more likely to participate in the survey where they received encouragement to do so from the academic staff involved in teaching their courses.
- 21.2 The Vice-Principal then reported that because the NSS was put out to final-year students only, the University was asking Senate's endorsement to put out a similar survey to undergraduate students in years 1–3 so that feedback could be acted on while students were able to benefit from it. If the undergraduate survey proved to be useful, then this would be rolled out to postgraduate levels as well.
- 21.3 The Principal commented that such a survey would be a very important barometer of student views.
- 21.4 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarized below:
- A student member spoke on behalf of the Student Association saying that it commended the Vice-Principal for being so proactive in working to improve the processes by which feedback was sought from students.
 - It was commented that some Schools still do not follow up on the SCEF forms and do not provide students with details of what happens to the feedback.
 - Another commented that some of the questions were ambiguous.
 - Another asked whether the Level would be indicated on the form so that the University could gauge whether there were different issues in different years.
 - Another commented that there might be a danger that students would get bored with so many surveys, and could not SCEFs and the other survey be combined?
 - One member asked whether a question regarding the value of CRef could be asked, to determine students' views and whether or not they were able to get the choice of courses they wanted.
 - A comment was also made that some of the language used in SCEFs, such as graduate attributes and employability might not be understood by students.
 - It was commented that some Schools offer round-table discussions with their students to gather feedback informally from all students on a course, and this sometimes indicated that student representatives did not always represent the views of their classmates. It was commented that the Student Association might do more in some instances to ensure student representatives understood their role.
 - The Vice-Principal responded to say that every attempt would be made to eliminate ambiguities as this would enhance analysis of the results. The Vice-Principal added that the timing of the various surveys would be crucial and that the SCEFs served to give feedback on specific courses whereas the new survey would not do that.
 - On the issues raised regarding the SCEFs and feedback, the Vice-Principal reported that the results went to a meeting of the Heads of School and to the Quality Assurance Committee, and that Schools should be reporting back to students on the main issues and their action plan for addressing them. He also reported that minutes from Staff–Student Liaison Committees should be distributed to the class representatives, who should then distribute to their class in order to close the loop.

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meetings on 25 January 2012, as under:

1. Amendments to the Regulations

- 22.1 The Senate approved, on behalf of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning the Resolutions, 'Supplementary Regulations for First Degrees in Education', 'Supplementary Regulations for First Degrees in Science' 'Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees' (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) and 'Amendments to Regulations for Diplomas & Certificates' (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

2. External Examining

- 22.2 On the recommendation of the Quality Assurance Committee, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved proposals to make minor changes to the University's processes relating to external examining. The changes are required as a result of the publication of *Chapter B7: External Examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

3. DATES AND ALLOCATIONS FOR JULY 2012 GRADUATIONS

- 22.3 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved the dates and allocations for the July Graduation Ceremonies.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meeting on 5 December 2011, as under:

1. Ordinance No 142 [Employment]

- 23.1 The Court had considered that Ordinance No 142 (Employment) had been approved by Her Majesty in Council on 15 December 2011.

GRADUATE DENTAL PROGRAMMES

- 24.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee held an extraordinary meeting on 12 January 2012. The Committee was advised of an issue concerning the length of the Graduate Degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) offered by the School of Medicine & Dentistry and its alignment, along with a number of other UK Degrees of BDS, with an EU requirement that dentists' studies should be of five years in length and a minimum of 5000 hours. The degree offered by the University is graduate entry and of four years in length. The Committee were advised that the University, together with the other dental schools in the UK affected by this problem, and the General Dental Council, UUK, were working with the UK Government to try to get the EU Directive amended to allow four-year degrees to be permitted.
24. The Senate noted that the Committee had considered it necessary, in the interim pending a long-term solution, to find a solution for current students on the programme. In line with the approach being taken in other universities affected, it was proposed to permit those students due to complete the programme in July 2012 to graduate and that the General Dental Council had confirmed they would register these graduates thereby permitting them to take up employment as dentists despite their degree being only four years in length. For those students in earlier years of the programme, it was hoped that a resolution in regard to the EU Directive would be known by the end of 2012 and, should a solution not be found, alternatives would be brought forward.

24.3 The Senate noted that the Committee considered that while this was an unfortunate situation, the proposed solution seemed to be the most appropriate in the circumstances and would align with that being taken elsewhere. The students and those applicants for entry in 2012 were advised of the matter on the afternoon of 12 January 2012.

24.4 The Senate noted that a letter had been received from the Student Convenor, Medicine and Dentistry, on behalf of the student body of the Dentistry Programme, thanking the University for its efforts and offering its support in seeking to amend the EU legislation.

SENATE APPOINTMENTS

25.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee had approved the following appointments:

- The appointment of Professor C Secombes (*vice* Professor J Speakman) as Convenor of the DSc Committee;
- The appointment of Professor C De Barri (*vice* Professor J Speakman) as a member of the Research Committee.