

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2011

Present: Principal, Professors Houlihan, MacGregor, McGeorge, Morgan, Haites, Rodger, Gane, Ross, Dr P Ziegler, Professors Crotty, Stollery, Secombes, Pym, Soulsby, O'Donoghue, Dr J Morrison, Professors Cotter, Walkden, Wallace, Nelson, Naphy, Dr B Connelly, Professor P Edwards, Dr M Ehrenscheidtner, Mrs L Clark, Dr K Shennan, Professor W F Long, Dr D Hay, Ms C Banks, Mr A Arthur, 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 Robson, 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, Mr N Curtis, Dr A D King, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr X Lambin, Dr L Hastie, Professor Robinson, Dr M Young, Dr A Jack, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Greig, Dr I Stansfield, Professor C de Bari, Dr S Fielding, Dr J Francis, Dr H Galley, Dr H Wallace, Professor J Newton, Dr S Semple, Dr D Martin, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Professors Chandler, Guz, Dr L Philip, Dr M Reid, Dr R Wells, Professor C Grebogi, Dr T J F Norman, Dr J Skakle, Dr G Coghill, Professors Fynsk, Robinson, Miss M McHaney, Miss L Sivula, Mr M Napier, Miss K Kaushik, Miss J Paton, Mr D McCroskie, Mr A Gillinsky, Mr E Pereira

Apologies: Professors Ingold, Black, McCaig, Greaves, Grant, Dr J Geddes, Dr D C Hendry, Mr M J Radford, Professor L D Ritchie, Mr D C McMurtry, Mr C Munro, Dr D J Smith, Dr R Vij, Dr C W Haerpfner, Dr A Carrington, Dr J Pettit, Dr D Scott, Dr N Vargesson, Dr J Celand, Dr A Denison, Professor S Heys, Dr L P Erwig, Ms K Harrild, Professor M Rogers, Dr G Shirreffs, Professor B Smith, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr D Pearson, Dr T Thevar, Professors Watson, Dobney, Dr D Jolley, Dr T Mighall, Professor Webster and Mr R Parker

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

18. The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2011 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

- 19.1 The Principal informed the Senate that Professor Lewis Ritchie had received a knighthood and Mrs Myra Pearson an OBE in the New Year Honours and asked the Senate to join with him in formally congratulating them both. He further invited the Senate to congratulate Paul Lockhead who had recently received a Frank Knox Fellowship.
- 19.2 The Principal update the Senate in regard to the University's financial position. In regard to the current year, he informed the Senate that international recruitment had been in line with that of last year whilst the budget had anticipated an increase in student numbers which had impacted on the budget. Looking ahead to next year, it was anticipated that there would be a 7-8% decrease in funding from the SFC which would equate to approximately £5.5M. In addition, the University would incur at £250K carbon reduction tax, £600K due to VAT increase, £400K in increased national insurance costs and £1.2M in additional USS costs. This would place a significant challenge in regard to the budget for the coming year. On a positive note, the voluntary severance scheme had realised £6M of savings for the coming year which would be supported by efficiency savings on the administrative-side. A further voluntary severance scheme was being rolled out focused on academic staff.
- 19.3 While the University would face financial challenges going forward, the Principal emphasised the need to ensure that there was no impact on the quality of the student experience. He informed the Senate that in terms of admissions, the University had seen a further increase in applications. In regard to the research agenda, focus would be on excellence and this was supported by the SFC's move to focus research funding to those 3* and 4* areas.

- 19.4 In drawing his opening statement to a close, the Principal encouraged the Senate in considering the financial challenges to also focus on the new Strategic Plan and the opportunities which this would present going forward. He then invited comment from the Senate. One member sought clarification in regard to the scale of the deficit. The Principal indicated it was dependent on the balance of income and expenditure and that the University was working hard to maximise income. He indicated it would be in the region of £10-12M but stressed that £6M had already been realised through savings from voluntary severance.

CONSULTATION ON THE GREEN PAPER: BUILDING A SMARTER SCOTLAND

- 20.1 The Principal introduced the paper on the Consultation on the Green Paper: Building a Smarter Scotland and the University's draft response (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, he highlighted that the paper places focus on the strengths of the Scottish higher education system and the funding challenges which the sector is facing. It sets out a number of ways in which this funding gap might be addressed. He informed the Senate that a number of consultation events were taking place across Scotland and that written responses were also being sought. He invited the Senate to comment on the Green paper and on the University's draft response. There followed a short discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- It was commented that if universities have a differing fee structure for non-Scottish UK students this might lead to the development of a class system.
- It was commented that working to develop curriculum links with other universities could be a positive move. In response it was noted that the agenda of collaboration would be important going forward.
- In regard to the section on Student Support, it was stressed that it is all students who face hardship not just those in particular groups.

- 20.2 Following the discussion, the Senate approved the University's draft response to the consultation.

STRATEGIC PLAN

- 21.1 The Principal introduced the paper on the Strategic Plan (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). He reminded the Senate that an earlier draft of the paper had been considered at the last meeting and that the paper under consideration at this meeting was the final draft. He informed the Senate that the Plan would be accompanied by a number of vignettes which would highlight past, present and future exemplars. In this regard, he encouraged the Senate to come forward with suggestions of possible vignettes for inclusion in the final document. He invited the Senate to comment on the final draft of the Strategic Plan. There followed a lengthy discussion, the main points of which are detailed below:

- One member of the Senate queried whether direct reference to RCUK priority areas should be included in the Plan. In response it was noted that it would not be appropriate to have a Plan which simply followed the RCUK priorities but rather it should focus on the areas of the University's expertise and should link where appropriate to RCUK. Focus should be on ensuring that the University has a strategy to maximise its success in regard to RCUK funding.
- A student member of the Senate questioned how the University plans to deal with the impact of the changes to immigration legislation and the likely reduction in international student numbers. In response, it was stressed that the University was working hard to lobby against the proposed changes to legislation. It was further noted that development of international partnerships would also be important.
- A student member of the Senate queried how increased entry requirements would affect those entering via the Summer School. In response, it was noted that the University would need to ensure provision of opportunities for those entering via non-traditional

backgrounds and as such further consideration might be given to expanding articulation links with FE Colleges.

- In regard to the reference to sustainability in the values, one member commented that this should be phrased more widely to cover added value not solely in regard to environmental impact.
- One member of the Senate queried where those outwith the interdisciplinary research themes would stand in regard to priority of resources. In response it was noted that the University would seek to support and invest in all areas of excellence not just those which form part of a research theme. It was stressed that the themes are valuable in terms of bringing together and focusing areas of strength.
- A student member of the Senate queried the target of 20% students having an overseas experience and in particular asked the current level of students engaged in such activities. In response it was noted that currently less than 10% students have such an experience. It was further noted that provision of sustained study programmes in languages might help encourage students to take up such an opportunity.
- One member of the Senate commented that the new Library is only mentioned in a limited way, it was proposed more should be made of this in regard to resources and the valuable collections and archives. It was further stressed that this should be an important aspect in the Enabling Objective section.
- In regard to the inter-disciplinary themes, it was proposed that the current themes mean that some key elements of CASS are not represented. It was suggested that it would be helpful to include another theme recognising the work in arts and humanities. In response it was noted that it is envisaged that new themes will develop over time and that pump-priming funding would be provided to support new emerging themes. It was further noted that the theme on 'the North' would be likely to include significant contributions from the humanities and social sciences.
- It was proposed that in regard to learning and teaching there should be more explicit reference in the aims to the importance of employability.

21.2 In drawing the discussion to a close, the Principal thanked the Senate for their input and advised that the comments would be taken on board in the development of the final version which would be considered by the Court at their meeting in March.

REVISED POLICY ON ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT COMPLAINTS

22.1 The Principal invited Professor Ross to present the revised Policy and Procedures on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). Professor Ross advised the Senate that the new Policy had been developed following a Kaizen review of the existing process. She advised that it was intended that the new Policy would be much simpler and more student-friendly than the current process. The new Policy would bring together in a single process the procedures for consideration of academic appeals and student complaints. She further stressed that the new Policy would place a greater emphasis on timely resolution at a local level with a formal institutional hearing only being required if resolution cannot be achieved locally. She invited questions from the Senate. There followed a short discussion, the main points of which are noted below:

- One member of the Senate proposed a minor amendment to Annexes A and B to provide opportunity for the staff member's representative to comment in addition to the staff member. It was noted that in practice all those present at hearings are given the opportunity to speak and as such it was agreed to incorporate this suggested change.
- It was queried whether an Administrative member of staff would be present in addition to the Case Officer at a formal hearing. In response it was confirmed that only the Case Officer would be present. It was agreed that the text would be amended to clarify this point. It was further stressed that it would not be appropriate for the Case Officer to bring any additional evidence to the hearing.
- A member of the Students' Association confirmed that the SA were most supportive of the new procedures.

- A student member of the Senate queried the number of student members who would serve on a formal hearing panel. In response it was noted that there would be two staff members and one student member plus the Case Officer in attendance.

22.2 There being no further questions, the Senate approved the revised Policy and Procedures and noted that it was planned that they be implemented with immediate effect. It was further noted that training sessions on the new policy were planned for key staff and the SA.

FRAMEWORK OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

23.1 The Senior Vice-Principal presented the paper on the Framework of Academic Excellence (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so he reminded the Senate that a core value in the Strategic Plan is the 'pursuit of excellence' and as such it was important that all academic staff are given the opportunity to contribute to the achievement of excellence. He informed the Senate that the Framework of Academic Excellence had been developed as a tool to help staff assess their contributions. The Framework would provide an opportunity to benchmark overall contribution across a number of different criteria. He advised the Senate that a period of consultation was being undertaken in regard to the new Framework and that he would be coming out to Schools for more detailed discussions in the near future.

23.2 The Senior Vice-Principal outlined to the Senate the structure of the new Framework. He informed Senate that the subdivisions into four academic areas had been developed on the basis of SFC and RAE groupings. In regard to the sections on (i) teaching-related roles and (ii) other significant contributions, he advised that these lists were indicative and should not be considered to be comprehensive. He further emphasised that the points to be drawn from these sections were not cumulative but rather should be based on the highest scoring activity.

23.3 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:

- One member of the Senate commented that the timing of the release of the consultation coinciding with the circulation of the communication about voluntary severance may lead to the two being linked which was unfortunate. It was further commented that there were some incongruous linkages made e.g. a quantity measure for teaching versus a quality measure of research. It was also noted that no reference was made to academic or pastoral advising roles. The integration of the Framework with elements such as the Strategic Plan, promotion criteria, academic role profiles, appraisal and workload management models was queried.
- One member of the Senate suggested that some scope within the Framework should be provided to recognise innovation.
- It was commented that the Framework as written would not encourage staff to engage in activities related to commercialisation of research as aspects such as patents and development of spin out companies would not be recognised by the Framework. In further discussion of this point, it was commented by one member that recognition of these types of activity is normally monetary and that such commercial activities should possibly be kept separate from academic elements. It was however noted that encouragement of third stream income was explicitly referred to in the Strategic Plan.
- In regard to the non-cumulative nature of the points associated with teaching-related roles and other significant contributions, it was commented that this could discourage staff from taking on additional, less highly scoring, activities.
- One member of Senate queried the classification of the two different humanities disciplines in regard to research spend particularly the inclusion of social science in group (iii). It was commented that research costs are probably equivalent to those of other humanities. In response it was noted that the data used had been drawn from RAE median spend.

- One member commented that while he understood the reasons for the Framework he questioned the need given many top universities do not use such a tool to measure excellence. In regard to research output, he proposed that the incentives of the Framework were different from those of REF with the former requiring 5 publications for achievement of the highest points whereas the latter requires 3 quality pieces of work. Similarly, he queried the different contact hour requirements included for teaching depending on the discipline being taught. In response, it was noted that the teaching contact hours used were drawn from College norms. In regard to publications, it was noted that this was seen as a helpful tool to recognise staff contributions.
- One member queried in regard to the humanities how the equivalent of spin-off in such areas (e.g. media work or involvement on advisory boards) might be included? He further questioned whether there should be some differential in regard to expectations between a lecturer and a professor. In response it was noted that the Framework had been developed at a high-level avoiding, where possible, too much granularity. The comment in regard to expectations was noted. In regard to impact, it was noted that it would be important to recognise and incentivise such activities.
- One member queried what would happen to those staff scoring less than 60 points. In response, it was noted that, in such an instance, it would be important for there to be discussion with the member of staff to explore how they might make a greater contribution to the University going forward.
- It was commented that the load associated with teaching a PgT course is very different to that of teaching a first year undergraduate course. Likewise, it was noted that the workload associated with the role of a PgR supervisor can be very different between disciplines.
- One member commented that while volume in terms of teaching is important, there should be some measure of teaching excellence. In response, the member of staff was invited to bring forward proposals of ways to evaluate teaching quality.
- One member, while supporting the principal of performance management, commented that on the basis of the current high-level style of the Framework it would be difficult to get agreement. He proposed that Heads of School should be empowered to take forward performance management without a need for the Framework. In response it was noted that there was a strong consensus view amongst Heads of School for some methodology in this area.
- The timeframe for implementation was queried by a couple of members of Senate. It was proposed that the timeline should be extended to allow for the outcome of the consultation to be brought back to Senate before consideration by the University Court. It was further noted that to date there had been not engagement with the Trade Unions. It was commented that there needed to be clarity in regard to what would happen should a staff member not achieve 60 points. In response it was noted that the timeframe should provide sufficient opportunity for staff to comment and for School/College meetings to be held.
- A student member of the Senate queried the unequal weighting given to research and teaching in the Framework and expressed concern about the lower weighting given to teaching. She further queried how the document would align with the Curriculum Reform initiatives and the emphasis placed on interdisciplinary engagement. In response it was noted that if there was a good measure of individual teaching quality then this would be used. She was encouraged to feed her thoughts in on this matter.
- It was commented that the Framework would discourage dual supervision which can be seen to be best practice in many areas. Similarly, it was noted that the Framework would also discourage external collaboration. In response it was noted that there should be no disadvantage to external collaboration and indeed such activities should be encouraged and that dual supervision should be the norm.
- One member commented that the Framework would be helpful tool in regard to guidance on academic expectations. In regard to the quantitative measure of teaching, it was proposed that an alternative to contact hours would be to use a credit measure.
- One member commented that the Framework would be a useful tool to use in supporting members of staff in achieving high quality.

- A student member queried whether the Framework would introduce additional bureaucracy. In response it was noted that the information used to inform the Framework was mostly centrally held.
- A student member commented that the Framework provides no opportunity for student feedback. In response it was noted that students can feedback via the SCEF exercise and that it was not necessarily appropriate for this to be directly linked to the Framework.
- The purpose of the Framework was queried. It was proposed more clarification about its purpose was required and its linkage to the furtherance of the objectives of the Strategic Plan. In response it was commented that while the vast majority of staff do an excellent job, there is known to be uneven distribution of workload. The provision of clear expectations in the Framework should aid in ensuring that staff are fully aware of what is expected of them.
- It was commented that there may need to be a degree of discretion for Heads of College / School in their use of the Framework particularly in regard to the tasks to be associated with the areas related to (i) teaching-related activities and (ii) other significant contributions. In response, it was noted that this would be appropriate.
- It was queried how junior staff might be expected to achieve some of the higher points in the Framework. In response it was noted that the Framework should also be used in a career development context in discussion with a line manager. It was further stressed that the Framework would not apply to probation as this is overseen by another method of review and support. Furthermore, for the two years following probation staff would not be expected to achieve the normal expectations set out in the Framework.
- Support was expressed for inclusion of public engagement in the Framework. In this regard, it was suggested that guidance on expected level of contribution would be helpful. In response, it was noted that this might be something for discussion with a Head of School.
- One member commented that the use of a points-based system might not encourage staff to perform better. For those doing less well, it was suggested that it might cause anxiety.
- One member commented that the Framework did not provide opportunity for student input. In response, it was noted that the Senior Vice-Principal would be happy to meet with the Students' Association to discuss in advance of its consideration at Court.
- It was commented that it would be important for teaching and research to be recognized equally.
- The role of the Framework as a tool was emphasised. It was stressed that it should not be seen as mechanistic but rather should be viewed as a tool to provide guidance on expectations and to be used developmentally where threshold expectations are not met.

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, role profiles, and workload management should be brought to the next meeting.

23.5 The Principal responded 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.

23.6 The Principal thanked colleagues for their contributions to the stimulating debate.

UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

24.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) presented the Update on the Curriculum Reform (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, he drew attention to the positive reaction to the Sixth Century course both at the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and by the External Examiners. He further commented that in regard to point 9 of the report,

wording had been developed for inclusion in programme prescriptions in the University Calendar in regard to the second year credit requirements for entry to honours to allow students to keep open two degree options whilst also taking enhanced study. He invited comment from the Senate on the report. There followed a short discussion, the main points of which are noted below:

- The uptake in languages in regard to the new curriculum was queried. In response it was noted that unlike others in the sector, there had been an increased uptake of language courses of approximately 30%. Interest in the new languages of Mandarin and Arabic had also been encouraging.
- One member of the Senate commented that it would be important to encourage Schools to move to a 45 credit 2nd year model to enable students to take languages or other elements of Enhanced study.
- A student member of the Senate commented that there was very positive student feedback in regard to the Sixth Century courses.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meeting on 7 December 2010, as under:

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

- 25.1 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. Rectorial Election

- 25.2 The Court approved, on recommendation from the Senate, the timetable for the forthcoming Rectorial Election in 2011.

3. Articulation Agreement with Aberdeen College

- 25.3 The Court approved, on recommendation from the Senate, the Progression and Articulation Agreement with Aberdeen College.

4. Draft Ordinance No 141 (Amendments of Powers of the University Court)

- 25.4 The Court drew to the Senate's attention that Ordinance No 141 [Amendments of Powers of the University Court], having been considered by Senate, Business Committee and Court, was approved by Her Majesty in Council on 15 December 2010.

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 26 January 2011, as under:

1. Amendments to Regulations

- 26.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft Resolution 'Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees' (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The Senate further agreed to delegate authority to the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching &

Learning to approve any amendments required subsequent to this meeting, arising from the Curriculum Reform revalidation exercise.

2. Amendments to Policies connected to student appeals and complaints

- 26.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court as required, the amendments to Policies associated with student appeals and complaints (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). Copies of the associated revised Guidance Notes are available at www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal.

3. International Foundation Programme

- 26.3 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning gave consideration to a paper on proposals for an International Foundation Programme and following discussion agreed that further consideration would be required outwith the meeting.

4. Dates and Allocations for July 2011 Graduations

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

5. Review of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for Higher Education

- 26.5 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning noted the University's response and the Universities Scotland responses to the recent consultation on the UK Professional Standards Framework submitted to the Higher Education Academy in January. The full consultation document is available at:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/universitiesandcolleges/accreditation/ukpsf-consultation.

6. Update reports from the Centre for Learning and Teaching

- 26.6 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning noted several reports providing updates from the Centre for Learning and Teaching, specifically:
pilots to explore the provision of online feedback on assessment;
the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching;
the Programme for Postgraduates and Postdoctoral Staff who Teach; and
the QAA Quality Enhancement Theme "Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes"

7. Advisory Board for the Centre for Learning and Teaching

- 26.7 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning noted that a small Advisory Board for the Centre for Learning and Teaching would be established.

VALIDATION AGREEMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

- 27.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Validation Agreement of the International Christian College in Glasgow for a period of five years from 1 April 2011, to supersede the existing validation agreement which will expire on 31 March 2011. A copy of the Validation Agreement at the Panel's report following the revalidation visit is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal.

RECTORIAL ELECTION

- 28.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, at its meeting on 24 January 2011, had approved revisions to the Campaign Rules for the forthcoming Election.

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

- 29.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate had approved the following panel from which membership of the new Appeals and Complaint Hearing Panel would be drawn as detailed below:
- Vice-Principals
 - Heads of School
 - Current Investigating Officers – Professors WF Long, N Webster and P Edwards and Mr A Arthur
 - Current members of the Senate Undergraduate & Postgraduate Academic Appeals Committees – Professor H Chandler, J Geddes, R Buckland, J Webster and J Leach, Drs D Hazlerigg, R Wells, P Davidson, D Smith, B Jones and R Bull, Mrs R Fitzpatrick and Mrs D McKenzie-Skene
 - Directors of Administrative Sections
- 29.2 The Senate further noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the following appointments:
- The appointment of Professor G Walkden (vice Professor A Rodger) and Professor WC Smith (vice Professor N Haites) as members of the Honorary Degrees Committee for the meeting on 28 October 2010 only.
 - The appointment of Dr B Jones as a member of the Senate Postgraduate Academic Appeals Committee.