

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

**Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2011**

*Present:* Principal, Professors Logan, Haites, McGeorge, Morgan, Rodger, Greaves, MacGregor, Ross, Stollery, Zalewski, Pym, Soulsby, O'Donoghue, Dr J Morrison, Dr S Davies, Professor Naphy, Dr B Connolly, Mr MJ Radford, Mrs L Clark, Dr M Ehrenschtendner, Ms C Banks, Professor N Hutchison, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr M Brown, Dr T Weber, Dr D Robson, Dr D J Smith, Dr J Stewart, Professor Syrotinski, Dr A Pillai, Professor Duff, Mr S Styles, Dr P Bernhagen, Mr N Curtis, Dr CW Haerper, Dr AD King, Dr A Carrington, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Stansfield, Professor C de Bari, Dr J Francis, Dr H Galley, Ms K Harrild, Professor Newton, Dr S Semple, Dr D Pearson, Dr S Duthie, Professor H Chandler, Professor Guz, Dr L Philip, Professor Grebogi, Dr J Skakle, Dr G Coghill, Miss Birley, Miss Sivula, Mr Grieve, Miss Johansson, Miss Kaushik, Miss Paton, Mr Filous, Miss Munday, Mr Bond, Mr Douglas, Mr Khan, Mr Johnson, Mr Butler Perks and Miss J Batty

*Apologies:* Professors Hannaford, Houlihan, Wallace, Paterson, Dr P Ziegler, Professors, Black, Baggs, McCaig, CN Macrae, Professor D Reid, Dr R Wells, Professor N Gow, Professor JD Nelson, Professor P Edwards, Dr S Lawrie, Dr DC Hendry, Professor Sir LD Ritchie, Dr K Shennan, Dr C Brittain, Dr B Marsden, Dr R O'Connor, Mr DC McMurtry, Professor P Mealor, Mr C Munro, Mr T Burns, Dr T Wills, Dr M Durham, Dr R Vij Dr M Delibegovic, Professor X Lambin, Dr L Hastie, Professor D Robinson, Dr A Jack, Dr J Pettitt, Dr D Scott, Dr N Vargesson, Dr J Cleland, Dr A Denison, Professor S Heys, Dr L P Erwig, Dr S Fielding, Professor M Rogers, Dr G Shirriffs, Dr H Wallace, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr D Martin, Dr L Williams, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr D Martin, Dr L Williams, Dr T Thevar, Professor J Watson, Dr D Jolley, Professor K Dobney, Dr T Mighall, Dr M Reed, Dr R Wells, Professor TJF Norman, Professor N Webster, Miss Bjorkqvist, Mr Fortune, Mr Marley, and Mr Denham

In opening the meeting, the Principal welcomed members to the first Senate of 2011–2012 and those members attending their first meeting in particular.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- 1.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16 August 2011.

**STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL**

- 2.1 The Principal updated the Senate on the events that had taken place over the summer months, namely the Open Day and the Postgraduate Open Day, both of which had been very successful. He reported that the University of Aberdeen Music Prize and the broadcast by the BBC of a new piece of work by Professor Paul Mealor, performed for a Remembrance Day service, were outstanding events that had attracted worldwide interest in the University. The Principal congratulated Professor Maelor and thanked him for organizing the Music Prize, which attracted 400 entries from 40 countries across the world.

**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF POST-16 EDUCATION**

- 3.1 The Principal invited the Senate to discuss and comment on the Scottish Government Review of Post-16 Education consultation (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). He opened the debate by reporting that the University had set its fees and in consultation with the student body had put in place a strong package of bursary schemes using at least 10% of the RUK fee income. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, which was welcomed by the University, the Principal reported that detail outlining how the funds will be allocated was

expected in a letter from the Scottish Funding Council in December. In addition, the letter issued from the Scottish Cabinet Secretary had already made five main statements regarding funding activity. These were as follows: greater flexibility in the learner journey; improving rates of retention and widening participation; governance; making Scotland world class in its research; and removal of geographical overlaps in provision.

3.2 There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- One member asked about the proposal to set up a national Knowledge Exchange Office and asked whether Aberdeen might be disadvantaged if such an office were located in the Central Belt. In response it was commented that no-one knew, yet, what was meant by reference to a 'national' office and discussion was required with the Scottish Funding Council to ensure no-one was disadvantaged.
- One member asked whether the call for making Scotland cutting-edge in research would mean that funding would be redirected from teaching to research. In response it was stressed that this was absolutely not the plan as Scotland had also committed to having a first-class student experience.

## **RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

4.1 The Senior Vice-Principal updated the Senate on Research Excellence Framework and on the associated Equality and Diversity Policy (copies filed with the principal copy of the minutes). With reference to the REF update, the Vice-Principal reported that an initial institutional review exercise had begun in the summer, and that a more detailed review was now taking place. He highlighted to the Senate that the new Research Excellence Framework (REF) included 'Impact' and that the University has considered this in some detail, with an Institutional Impact Panel having been set up to look at the probable numbers of submissions and the quality of the impact statements.

4.2 With reference to the paper on Equality and Diversity, the Vice-Principal outlined to the Senate that it was now a condition of the REF to have an Equality and Diversity Code of Practice for the selection of staff, the Code having to be approved by the REF Equality Challenge Unit before an institution is allowed to submit. The Vice-Principal reported that the University already had a Policy (2008) and that this has been updated and the Draft discussed by the REF Steering Group and the University Management Group (UMG). The Vice-Principal reported that the REF Equality Challenge Unit also require all staff making selections for the REF to undergo equality and diversity training. The Vice-Principal concluded his report by saying that the final version of the Code would go to Court in December.

4.3 The Principal then invited comments or questions. There followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarized below:

- One member noted that the University had not used external reviewers this year and asked whether the University had any information on how accurate their assessments had been last year. In response, it was reported that the University had not used external reviewers yet but added that there would be an opportunity to do that and to use their assessments as a benchmark for our own internal assessments. Last year, some assessments had matched the University's own and had been accurate; however, others had assessed the material to be better than it was subsequently judged to be.
- One member commented that the subject committees seemed to vary in how they defined and evaluated impact. In response it was agreed that this was the case and that until the specifics for the various subject areas had been defined, the University was taking advice from colleagues who were members of the subject panels.
- One member noted that the Draft Code of Practice measured only some of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, having missed out 'sexual orientation' and 'religion or belief'. He wondered why this was and thought that the University should be seen to be measuring for all the characteristics not just some of them. In response it was

said that the comment should be reported back as the member had made a very sensible and helpful point and that the University should ensure it is following standard practice and including all protected characteristics in the Code.

## NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

- 5.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) outlined the report on the National Student Survey (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In doing so, he reported that the National Student Survey (NSS) had to be read in a wider context as it was only one of the tools used to obtain student feedback and gauge satisfaction. He commented that the University need to use all of the tools available (e.g. student course evaluation forms, staff–student liaison committees, the class representatives system) on an ongoing basis to improve what the University do. The Vice-Principal reminded Senate that any action to address issues highlighted by an NSS survey would not affect the students who had raised the issues as the survey was completed by final year students. However, he pointed out that because the NSS is national and made publically available, it is an important factor in the league tables and gains media attention. The Vice-Principal reported that there is a high level of satisfaction with our courses, but that if the data are unpacked the University does better in some areas than in others. He commented that the NSS was a rough tool and that in areas where the University is not doing well, those areas should engage with the class representatives to find out more precisely how improvement could be made, especially if those areas believe they are doing well. He also commented that where the University is doing well this should be publicised better and that practice shared across the institution. The Vice-Principal reported that the paper had gone to the University Management Group and that he had held meetings with all Heads of School to suggest areas of good practice that Schools might want to share with others, and to discuss areas that Schools might want to improve. He continued that there is a lot of good practice going on, but suggested that communication might be a problem as the perception of students did not seem to match what was happening in some areas. He then opened the floor to the College Directors of Teaching and Learning for additional comment.

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

- One member noted that the University normally focused on the questions and the statistics, and welcomed the focus being on the feedback itself and how the University could improve.
- Another commented that in CLSM they had met with the students, speaking with entire classes, and this had helped to make improvements.
- Another said that it had been said that many students were not aware of the feedback framework and the associated feedback website and another member commented on the low response rate in some areas to the National Survey.
- Another commented that much of the focus on the Feedback Framework is about the timeline – emphasizing that the University should not focus just on the promptness of feedback, but also on its quality.
- Another asked what the University had done to ensure that students responded to the National Student Survey and to improve the response rate.
- Another asked what was being done to ensure Schools who had not done well were putting in place improvements.
- Another commented that the feedback had come as a complete surprise because their staff-student liaison meetings suggested the School was doing things well, it was only when they saw the results of the Survey that they realised there were areas needing improvement. The member commented that in future they would be meeting with whole classes, not just reps, in order to get a more realistic overview of how they were doing.
- Another asked how students might be informed about the action plans that Schools were putting in place.
- Another reiterated that it was not about the statistics and the feedback, but about how the University use them to improve or share good practice.

- In response to the various points raised, the Vice-Principal Learning and Teaching noted that that it was important to look at the student feedback as a whole, not just at the statistics that were generated, as these did not enable the University to improve practice, just to know where the University was doing well or less well. He reminded members that the National Student Survey is just one of many tools that can be used for improving the student experience and that the Survey is a National Survey sent directly to the students, it is not a University survey sent out by the University. He also reminded Senate that the survey is completed by final-year students and, because of this, any improvements would not enhance the experience for the students who had completed the survey. He informed Senate that much communication had been put out in various ways (email, MyAberdeen, in lectures and tutorials, through the AUSA) to promote the National Student Survey and the Feedback Framework. It was therefore surprising that the response rate was low and it would be good if the student class representatives could do more to assist. In response to the point about ensuring action on the part of Schools who were not doing well, the Vice-Principal said that Schools had been asked to draw up action plans and that progress on these would be followed up with meetings with the Heads of School. The action plans were also to outline dissemination of best practice where it had been noted that Schools were doing well. It was also reported that Heads of School were being encouraged to share their action plans with their students. The point about the timing of the dissertations was noted. The Vice-Principal also noted that the Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF) were also now going to be distributed and completed on-line, and this should assist in gathering useful and timely feedback from all levels of student so that improvements could be made.

5.2 In drawing the discussion to a close, it was noted that Schools would take forward their action plans and that progress would be kept under review.

## **ADMISSIONS REPORT**

6.1 The University Secretary presented the Admissions Report (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The report showed that the University had healthy undergraduate recruitment. He went on to report that this year the University had brought undergraduate recruitment in line with the caps on numbers, and that this had been done by using a gathered field. He reported that RUK numbers would remain unregulated, but that the Scottish funded student numbers would be reduced in order to recognize the shift to unregulated RUK places. The University was considering different admissions protocols in order to deal with this. The Secretary reported that postgraduate research student applications had continued to increase. However, he drew Senate's attention to the shortfall in postgraduate taught applications, and noted that the reasons for this were being analysed.

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

- One member asked how places were capped – was it by course or by University as a whole? The Secretary reported that the formulas for capping numbers were complex. They were national, set by government, and broken down into broad areas and whether these were priority or non-priority, in addition to this the funding bodies then determined how many places would be funded. The expectation was that any shortfall would be made up by fee-paying RUK and overseas students. It was not anticipated that there would be fees for EU students.
- One member questioned whether the introduction of RUK fees would have an impact on future research student applications due to the financial such RUK students might carry at the end of their studies. In response it was said that at the moment the University did not know whether or not this would be the case. He reminded Senate that the University has introduced a number of scholarships to encourage RUK students to come to Aberdeen.
- One member questioned the impact of RUK fees on entry standards, whether raised entry standards plus fees meant that fewer students were applying. In response it was noted the multi-faceted nature of the issue made it difficult to assess the impact of the raised

standards or fees alone as the issues that dissuade students from applying are complex. Conditional offers would be made to RUK students on the basis of BBB and Clearing would also provide additional flexibility to fill places.

6.2 The Principal thanked the University Secretary for his Report.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH GOVERNANCE**

7.1 The Senate approved the Framework for Research Governance.

## **REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meetings on 28 June and 27 September 2011, as under:

### **1. Draft Resolution No 266 of 2011 [Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees]**

8.1 The Court noted that the draft Resolution No 266 of 2011 [Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees] had been approved by the Senate and considered by the Business Committee of the General Council and that no other representations had been received, approved the Resolution.

### **2. Draft Resolution No 267 of 2011 [Amendments to the code of Practice on Student Discipline]**

8.2 The Court approved the draft Resolution [Amendment to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline] and agreed that the Draft Resolution be passed forthwith in accordance with the provisions of Section 6(2) of the Universities Scotland Act 1966.

## **REPORT FROM THE UCTL**

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

### **1. Enhancement-led Institutional Review – Year-on follow-up report**

9.1 The Committee noted the one year follow-up report submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) following the ELIR review undertaken during 2010. This report was approved by QAA and was published on the QAA website on Thursday 3 November. The report is available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Pages/University-of-Aberdeen.aspx>

### **2. Mitigating Circumstances Form**

9.2 The Committee approved a proposal to introduce a standard form for reporting factors affecting students' studies together with a template for the form. The Committee were of the view that the form should be electronic hence the timing of the introduction of the form will be dependent on resource availability.

### **3. Headings for minutes of Examiners' meetings**

9.3 The Committee approved a set of standard headings to be included as a minimum in the minutes of Examiners' meetings. It is anticipated that by introducing a standard set of headings for minutes, together with standard guidance, there will be greater consistency in the quality of the minutes produced across the Institution.

#### **4. Centre for Learning and Teaching Annual Report 2010-11**

- 9.4 The Committee discussed the Annual Report from the Centre for Learning and Teaching. It was agreed that the report should be circulated more widely to ensure that academic staff are aware of the support and activities available from the Centre. The report is available at [www.abdn.ac.uk/~woc014/documents/Reports/CLT\\_annual\\_report\\_2011\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~woc014/documents/Reports/CLT_annual_report_2011_FINAL.pdf)

#### **5. Annual Report on the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice in Learning and Teaching**

- 9.5 The Committee discussed the Annual Report on the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice in Learning and Teaching prepared as part of the University's Strategy for the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice. The Committee agreed that the Report should be made widely available and be included at college teaching committees in the first instance. The report is available at [www.abdn.ac.uk/~woc014/documents/Reports/Dissemination\\_report\\_UCTL\\_2011\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~woc014/documents/Reports/Dissemination_report_UCTL_2011_FINAL.pdf)

#### **6. Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) Section 6.1 Implementation: Update Report**

- 9.6 The Committee considered an update on the implementation of the section of the HEAR which will detail the co-curricular activities recognised by the University. Draft lists of Institutionally recognised activities and Student Association recognised activities were considered. The Committee agreed that there should be further discussion to refine the lists before an initial position for implementation is approved. Proposals will be discussed further at a future meeting.

#### **7. Annual Institutional Statement on Internal Review Activity 2009-2010**

- 9.7 The Committee noted the Annual Institutional Statement on Internal Review Activity 2010-2011, submitted to the Scottish Funding Council in September 2011. The report is available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/>.

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

- 10.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the membership of Senate Committees, Joint Committees of the Senate and Court and Committees of the Court with Senate representation for 2011/12 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minute)..

#### **RECTORIAL ELECTION**

- 11.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, approved the appointment of Professors P McGeorge and M Ross as the Senate representatives on the Rectorial Election Committee.

## **GIFFORD COMMITTEE**

- 12.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, approved the appointment of Professor J N'Dow as a member of the Gifford Committee (*vice* Professor B Smith).

## **DIRECTORS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES**

- 13.1 The Senate noted, on the recommendation of the relevant Heads of College, that the Senate Business Committee had approved the appointments of the following as Directors of Undergraduate Programmes with effect from the start of session 2011/12 for one year in the first instance:

Physical Sciences	Dr D Hendry (Engineering)
Arts & Social Sciences	Mrs E Clark (Education)
Arts & Social Sciences	Dr M Ehrenscheidtner (Divinity)