

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2008

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Houlihan, Ms C Macaslan, Professors Gane, Macgregor, Haites, Rodger, Frost, Fynsk, Ingold, Black, Secombes, McGeorge, O'Donoghue, Salmon, Cotter, Walkden, Naphy, Dr B Connelly, Dr P Edwards, Professor Long, Dr J Geddes, Dr D Hendry, Professor Burgess, Dr P Ziegler, Ms C Banks, Mr A Arthur, Dr B Marsden, Dr M Mills, Professor Schaper, Mr D McMurtry, Mrs F Payne, Mrs A Valyo, Dr A Gordon, Dr H Hutchison, Professor Saunders, Dr J Stewart, Dr A Campbell, Professor Carty, Mr S Styles, Mr N Curtis, Dr D Galbreath, Dr AD King, Professor Wallace, Dr P Fraser, Dr L Hastie, Professor Robinson, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Young, Dr I Greig, Dr A Jack, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr B Müller, Dr J Pettitt, Dr D Scott, Dr K Shennan, Dr N Vargesson, Professor de Bari, Professor J Liversidge, Dr T MacFarlane, Dr M Psatha, Professor Rogers, Dr G Shirriffs, Dr van Teijlingen, Dr H Wallace, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr D Pearson, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Professor Guz, Dr N Spedding, Professor Anderson, Dr J Skakle, Dr S Townsend, Professor Webster, Mr D McKay, Ms J Elliott, Ms S Stevenson, Mr J Simpson, Mr K Naismith, Mr S Mcmenemy, Mr S Qureshi, Ms T Smith, Mr S Doolin and Mr N Edwards.

Apologies: Professors Morgan, McCaig, Greaves, Imrie, Mr C Munro, Dr A Arnason, Professors Blair Smith, Chandler, Reid, Thevar, Watson, Dr T Mighall, Professor Price, Ms C Allnutt and Ms L Bruce.

**CURRICULUM REFORM COMMISSION'S FINAL REPORT – ENHANCING LEARNING:
THE ABERDEEN APPROACH**

- 1.1 The Principal opened the meeting by reminding members that this special meeting of the Senate was being held to consider the final report from the Curriculum Reform Commission. He informed members that the first scheduled meeting of the Senate in 2008/09 would be on 19 November 2008. He drew members' attention to the proposal that the meeting be web-cast and asked whether there were any objections to this proposal. There being none, it was agreed that the meeting should be web-cast.
- 1.2 The Principal informed members that the Curriculum Reform process had been one of the most comprehensive processes of consultation in the history of the University. While the Commission's final report had been published, there remained much to be done before any final decisions are taken on implementation of any reforms. He therefore encouraged the Senate to focus in the debate on the high level principles of the recommendations. Subject to agreement on the recommendations set out in the report, more detailed proposals would be prepared and would be brought back in due course to the Senate. He reminded members that the detailed implementation would not commence without the agreement of the Senate. He further emphasised that he hoped that the debate would take place across the Senate rather than being a dialogue with the Commission.
- 1.3 Speaking personally, the Principal informed the Senate that he felt very positive about the Commission's recommendations which he considered to be coherent and to have integrity. He, however, reminded members that as Principal his role had been one of encouraging the process of curriculum review and not to take a view on the detail of that process. Looking to the future, he would seek to support the decisions of the Senate and help to ensure that these are enacted.
- 1.4 The Vice-Principal (Curriculum Reform) in his role as Chair of the Commission presented the final report from the Commission. In opening his presentation, he thanked all members of the Commission and its sub-groups for their commitment and hard work over the past year, and all colleagues who had contributed to the discussions. A copy of the presentation is appended to the principal copy of the minutes.

- 1.5 Following the presentation, the Principal opened the debate and invited members of the Senate to comment on the Commission's proposals as set out in the Final Report. There followed a wide-ranging discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:
- i. There was general discussion in regard to the issue of curriculum breadth. Points made included (i) the new Curriculum for Excellence in schools will encourage both breadth and depth and therefore the Curriculum Reform proposals align well with planned changes to the school curriculum; (ii) in comparison to the more rigid curriculum of the English HE system, the proposed curriculum breadth is appealing; (iii) the proposals for breadth are not as radical as some would have wished but the balance with the inclusion of discipline breadth seems appropriate; (iv) concern that the need for breadth may be difficult in those areas where degrees are accredited by Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSBs); (v) concern that the requirement for breadth may overload students; (vi) the opportunity for breadth will provide greater scope for students to take humanities; (vii) wariness regarding the issue of compulsion in regard to breadth and concern that this may not be seen as appealing by all students. In response to these points, it was noted that the proposals set out a number of ways (Sixth Century Courses; Sustained Study and Discipline Breadth) by which students can achieve the requirement for Enhanced Study. It was further noted that market research conducted has shown that applicants and pre-applicants were attracted by the idea of breadth within the curriculum particularly Scottish and international students. This was also seen as attractive by employers. Furthermore, many PSBs also support the idea of curriculum breadth. It was noted that there are already compulsory elements in all degree programmes. It was further proposed that it would be helpful to Schools if clear guidance could be provided in regard to the way in which enhanced study requirements should be selected. An additional comment from a Senator was to note that colleagues should be careful not to look on curriculum breadth as being opposed to depth within programmes as in many disciplines, it is by considering breadth that one can develop sufficient depth of knowledge.
 - ii. It was proposed that the relative responsibilities of the Implementation Board and the Academic Standards Committee in reviewing the new curriculum would need to be carefully set out. In response, it was noted that the ASC would continue to perform its existing function. The Implementation Board would act to ensure that the proposals for Sixth Century Courses and Sustained Study Programmes align with the objectives of Enhanced Study. It was similarly noted that clarity in regard to the role of the Implementation Board and/or ASC in programme review (as detailed in recommendations 6 and 47) would be required.
 - iii. There was discussion in regard to the resource implications of the proposals. Points made included (i) the need to recognize the scale of the effort involved to implement the proposals and to ensure that impact on staff is managed; (ii) the flagship nature of the Sixth Century Courses and the resources and timescale required to develop properly such courses; (iii) the need to ensure that any budget allocation does not encourage competition between schools for students; (iv) the need to manage carefully the risks associated with implementation of the proposals. In response, it was envisaged that there would be open competition for the design of the Sixth Century Courses with appropriate resources being provided. The issue of risk would be closely monitored by the Implementation Board. The Resources Group was currently reviewing the resource implications of the proposals and this would be used to inform the work of the Implementation Board.
 - iv. A request from the student members that mechanisms be provided to ensure that they are part of the implementation process. In response, it was noted that it was already intended that the Implementation Board would include student members.
 - v. Concern was expressed by student members of the Senate in regard to the proposals set out in recommendation 37 concerning timetabling. They stressed that students did not support the proposals for blocked teaching and would rather prefer a structured approach with teaching taking place at standardised times in consistent locations. They further did not welcome the possibility of the teaching day being expanded into evenings or weekends as students use this time to work or take part in co-curricular activities. The matter had been discussed by the Students' Association

Council and the views expressed had the support of the Council. In response, it was noted that the proposals set out in the Report solely proposed that there should be a detailed investigation of blocked teaching and a review of the teaching day. Any changes proposed would come back to Senate in due course for approval. It was further noted that any changes to the timetable would need to recognize the diversity of the student body and staff.

- vi. One member commented that the proposals did not make any explicit reference to the importance of research-led teaching. In response, it was noted that a number of the Graduate Attributes clearly illustrate this link. Furthermore, the Sixth Century Courses would also seek to include research links within their provision.
 - vii. The alignment of the proposed framework of provision with the requirements of the Bologna process was queried. In response, it was confirmed that they would conform. The framework of provision set out in the Curriculum Reform proposals aligns with the requirements of the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework and, as such, would align with the Framework of the European Higher Education Area. It was also raised with reference to the proposals for Enhanced Study that breadth of education is one of the expected principles to be embraced by Universities in signing up to the Bologna Process.
 - viii. In regard to the Graduate Attributes, it was proposed that these seemed aspirational and it was suggested that there may need to be mechanisms to guarantee that those leaving the University have achieved these. It was further suggested that a set of attributes may need to be determined for each category of award. It was further queried whether a student graduating with a third class degree could be expected to have the same level of attainment of the attributes as someone gaining a first class degree. In response, it was noted that the Attributes were drafted for undergraduate degrees. Sets of attributes would require to be produced, in due course, for postgraduate taught and research awards. A student's degree class would provide an indication of the level of achievement of these Attributes.
 - ix. In regard to the proposal that there be an advanced entry, three year honours degree, it was proposed that this be designed in such a way as to make this distinctive and accessible to students.
 - x. One member commented that it would be important for Schools/Colleges to 'own' their provision and that care should be taken to ensure that the requirements for review and monitoring should not work against this. In response, it was acknowledged that staff ownership would be important. It was however stressed that the external processes for quality assurance and enhancement rely on the University having robust internal processes to assure the quality of provision at the subject level.
 - xi. The student members of the Senate stressed their view, in regard to recommendation 31, that academic advising should remain the responsibility of Schools and should not be part of any 'one-stop-shop' student centre. They further stressed the view that the proposed co-curricular awards should be prestigious and should have detailed requirements to ensure that they are robust.
- 1.6 In bringing the meeting to a close, the Principal noted that the debate had shown there to be broad agreement of the proposals set out in the Final Report and thanked members for engaging fully in the debate. He informed members that a summary of the main issues raised would be collated and circulated to members of the Senate. These, together with any comments arising from discussion of the Report at the University Court, would be considered at a further meeting of the Commission and the outcome of these discussions would be fed back to a future meeting of the Senate.