In opening the meeting, the Senior Vice-Principal informed the Senate that the Principal had sent his apologies as he was away from the University on University business.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

71. The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2009 were approved.

STATEMENT BY SENIOR VICE-PRINCIPAL

72.1 The Senior Vice-Principal informed the Senate that three questions to the Principal had been received in advance of the Senate Meeting and that these items would be taken before the main business of the meeting.

72.2 He informed the Senate that a request for an up-date on the progress of replacing the Rocking Horse Nursery Building had been received from two members of the Senate. He invited the University Secretary to provide an update to Senate. The University Secretary informed the Senate that there had been much activity in regard to the issue of the Rocking Horse Nursery involving Human Resources, Estates, the Nursery Manager and Parents Plus. Discussions had also been held with the Chair of the Trustees, the Nursery Manager and the Chief Executive of Aberdeen Sports Village in regard to the possibility of opening up access to the ASV Crèche Facility to University staff and students. He further stressed that the University was committed to ensuring that, in taking forward the developments, there is no interruption to nursery provision and to a financially but not necessarily commercially viable development. In response, a member of the Senate questioned whether given the likely financial challenges ahead whether it would be appropriate to bring forward the building work. In response, it was noted that the
University was currently reviewing its Ten Year Capital Plan which includes the planned Nursery developments. It was further queried whether there had been any progress into the three possible sites for the new nursery which were being investigated. In response it was noted that eight potential sites had been considered but these had been narrowed down to a couple of sites which were believed would be acceptable.
72.3 The Senior Vice-Principal informed the Senate that a second question had been received in regard to the appointment of a Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the fact that this post remained unfilled. In response, the Senior Vice-Principal informed the Senate that it had been disappointing that the University had been unable to fill the vacancy to date but stressed that the University was continuing to search for a person of appropriate high quality to fill that role. He further stressed that, with Professor Long taking responsibility for the University’s Committee on Teaching and Learning and preparations for Enhancement-Led Institutional Review and with Professor MacGregor overseeing Curriculum Reform, he was content that there had been little impact on the University’s normal function in the absence of a Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching).

72.4 The Senior Vice-Principal informed the Senate that a request had been made in advance of the meeting to bring forward item 7.2 on the Items for Information for discussion. In particular, it had been requested that there be a discussion on the detail of how the University intends to support students in writing up their thesis within 48 months and how the University intends to support those students who are outwith the maximum period of study. The Senior Vice-Principal asked the Convenor of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning to respond. In response, it was noted that the Code of Practice for Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers expects that supervisors will provide assistance to students during their supervisory period and for the following period of twelve months. He further noted that Skills Forge was being introduced to provide additional support in regard to personal and professional development for PhD students. He further stressed that the Code of Practice does not normally expect supervisors to act outwith the writing-up period past 48 or 60 months but noted that it may be appropriate for individuals to provide support and encouragement to those students to help them complete. In response, the President of the Students’ Association stressed it would be important for this issue to get further discussion as he queried the amount of consultation that had been conducted with PhD students in regard to the proposed changes. He further stressed it would be helpful at 36 months of a student’s PhD studies to review progress and ensure that work was on track for completion within the normal timeframe. In many cases he noted that students had to balance work in regard to writing-up with work in teaching and marking commitments. He supported the changes going forward but proposed that the ASC (Postgraduate) should be asked to give further consideration to the detailed support issues. There followed a period of discussion and the main points of which are noted below:

- It was noted that no major change to the regulations was being proposed rather the change was largely to encourage students to write up within their supervised period of study as prescribed by the regulations.
- In regard to student support, it was noted that Colleges and Graduate Schools play a central role in ensuring PhD students are supported in their studies and that students’ progress throughout their PhD is closely monitored by six-monthly progress reports.
- The importance of the need to encourage students to complete in a timely manner was stressed. It was noted that a significant effort was put in in regard to PhD student recruitment and support in-line with Roberts Agenda and Skills Forge but it was noted the current completion rate suggests that many students are not completing in a timely manner.
- It was queried whether the changes proposed would apply to current students. In response it was noted that it is normal practice not to apply such changes retrospectively where these are to the detriment of students. Nevertheless it was noted that it would be appropriate to convey the need to complete in a timely manner to all students and that this was in-line with the existing regulatory framework.
• It was noted that the UK Research Councils require submission within 48 months whereas the University's regulations permit those not funded by a UK Research Council a maximum of 60 months to complete their studies. This disparity was queried.
• It was stressed that the changes proposed were not resulting in significant revisions to the regulations rather they represented a change from in terminology from “writing-up” to “extension” and a move to encourage students to submit in-line with the existing regulations. In this regard, it was noted that a re-instatement fee had been proposed for students submitting outwith the maximum period of study.
It was proposed that there could be sometimes confusion for PhD students as regards the nature of PhD study. It was commented that students can get caught between issues of scholarly research versus the other requirements which fall upon them such as applying for grants, demonstrating etc.

It was queried how the re-instatement fee would support students and be seen to encourage submission. In response it was noted that there was no reference to the fees for writing-up/re-instatement in the regulations and hence these could go forward but that, in the light of the discussions, it would be appropriate to refer the issues of support needs and fees particularly the re-instatement fee and back to the ASC for consideration.

One Senator proposed that the issue of writing-up should have been on the agenda for discussion rather than for routine approval. It was stated that it was the perception that the writing-up year had always been part of the three plus one year structure and that there was a belief that students now had to complete within three or four years and that if they did not that they would be unable to complete their PhD. It was suggested that this was a very negative message and that the University should be seen to be supportive and not punitary.

In closing the debate the Senior Vice-Principal stressed that the proposals were intended to be supportive and to encourage students to submit in a timely manner. In approving the regulatory changes set out in the Omnibus Resolution, he noted that the ASC (Postgraduate) would be asked to give consideration to the detailed issues raised in the debate in particular in regard to the support structure for PhD students and the issue of fees to be charged to those writing-up.

The Senior Vice-Principal reminded the Senate that the 2010 National Student Survey had commenced on the 8 February and would be open until the end of April. He asked that staff support the survey and actively promote it to final year undergraduates.

ORAL REPORTS FROM HEADS OF COLLEGE

The Heads of College gave a presentation to the Senate (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). Following these presentations there followed a short period of discussions, the main points of which are outlined below:

One Senator queried whether the Nursery’s provision at the Rowett would be relocated to Foresterhill. In response it was noted that the Nursery’s provision at the Rowett was a private facility and that there were no plans to move it to Foresterhill.

The Student President queried whether the increase in Master’s student recruitment in the College of Physical Sciences had been reflected by an equivalent increase in support. In response it was noted that the Fraser Noble refurbishment had created an enhanced environment for students and that there were plans to expand such facilities to other areas. It was further noted that the issue of student support was foremost in the minds of the College Executives and that consideration was being given to a scholarship scheme.

In regard to the competition for PhD funding in the College of Arts & Social Sciences, a member of the Senate questioned where the suggested topics came from and how these were judged. In response it was noted that these were developed in Schools who had to demonstrate that the project was capable of sustaining a number of students. The allocation of funds had been overseen by a College Committee which included external involvement from another College.

A student member of the Senate queried the provision for undergraduate teaching in Philosophy. In response it was noted that a number of new appointments had been made mainly at lecturer level and that care would be taken to ensure the necessary spread of expertise and the balance between teaching and research capacity.
UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

74.1 The Senior Vice-Principal invited the Vice-Principal (Curriculum Reform) to update the Senate on progress of the implementation of the Curriculum Reform recommendations (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In presenting the update, the Vice-Principal informed the Senate that the implementation was progressing satisfactorily. He informed the Senate that the Enhanced Study Group would be meeting on the 23 February and the Implementation Board on the 8 March and that the latter would receive a report on progress in regard to timetabling. He informed the Senate that the Scottish Funding Council had now responded to the University’s funding bid and had advised that it was not appropriate to allocate such funds under the Horizon Fund but rather had encouraged the University to re-submit under the Learning to Work Two Scheme focusing on the elements in regard to work placements and the co-curriculum. Work to prepare the bid was ongoing with a deadline for submission of the end of March. It was further noted that the call for the second phase of the Sixth Century Courses to be delivered from September 2011 had now been circulated to staff. It was further noted that there continued to be interest from several UK universities in regard to the University’s Curriculum Reform activities and that an article had been published in the Guardian.

74.2 The Student President asked for an update in regard to progress with the new timetable and changes to the advising system. In regard to advising, it was noted that a short-term sub-group of JNCC had brought forward recommendations and that a meeting had been held with the UCU to discuss these with regard to establishing the principles to underpin the new advising system. There was optimism in regard to an agreement on these being reached. In regard to the new timetable, it was noted that work was progressing and that a report would be presented to the Implementation Board on the 8 March.

POSTGRADUATE GRADE SPECTRUM

75.1 The Senior Vice-Principal invited the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning to present the paper on the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In presenting the paper, the UCTL Convener informed the Senate that the recommendations had been developed by a Working Group of the UCTL. The paper had been discussed at the recent UCTL where it had met with support but this had not been unanimous. In outlining the paper he informed the Senate that, in terms of the Scottish Credits and Qualifications Framework, the requirements for the Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and Master’s degrees are all at Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 11 (AU level 5). He noted that the current Postgraduate Grade Spectrum sets a barrier for progression from the Diploma to the Master’s stage of CAS 12 in at least three quarters of the elements of assessment. He noted, however, that because the Diploma and Master’s stage are both at SCQF level 11 there should be no distinction between the level of difficulty between the two stages. He further stressed that the current requirement of the Postgraduate Grade Spectrum mean that it is difficult for some students to understand why they are not able to progress when they have passed but have not achieved CAS 12. He also reminded the Senate of the significant increase in international students studying on Postgraduate Taught Master’s programmes and stressed that such students take time to settle in to their studies. In this regard, he noted that the current Grade Spectrum requirements can impact disproportionately on such students. In drawing his introduction to a close, he highlighted to the Senate the three main strands of the proposals being presented as detailed in Appendix 2 of the paper:
(i) the removal of the criteria for ‘no progression’ as these were now considered to be redundant;

(ii) a change in the progression requirements from the Diploma to the Master’s stage of the degree from CAS 12 in three quarters of the elements to 9 or better in all elements;

(iii) a change to the criteria for the award of the Diploma and the Master’s degree with commendation from marks at 15 or better in three quarters of the total elements of assessment to marks at 15 or better in half of the total elements of assessment.
75.2 He informed the Senate that the paper had been discussed by Heads of School and by the UCTL and that it had also received broad support from the University Management Group.

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

- One member of the Senate proposed that the changes to the Postgraduate Spectrum should be deferred until the outcome is known of the review of the Common Assessment Scale being undertaken by a Working Group of the UCTL. In regard to the proposed changes to the requirements for the award of the Diploma and Master’s Degree with commendation, it was noted that these would bring the postgraduate awards in line with those for the undergraduate qualifications and the reason for this change was queried. In response in regard to the review of the Common Assessment Scale, it was noted that this work was ongoing and that points made would be taken on board but that it was appropriate to keep the two reviews separate to enable the changes to Grade Spectrum to be made more speedily.

- One member of the Senate, in supporting the recommendations, stated that these would help enhance the University’s reputation and make it clearer the threshold standard for a Master’s Degree. It was noted that the current criteria for progression are difficult for students to understand.

- One member of the Senate in fundamentally disagreeing with proposals stressed that he considered the difference between a Certificate, Diploma and a Master’s Degree to be not solely down to the number of credits but also to merit. He stressed that if the criteria for a Master’s Degree were to switch from CAS 12 to CAS 9 then more students would fail.

- It was noted that if the proposals were accepted that Schools would need to review their descriptors for the different CAS bands.

- A member of the Senate expressed concern at the proposed loss of the hurdle for progression from the Diploma to Master’s stage.

- It was noted that those failing to achieve a CAS 9 required for progression to the Master’s Degree would be eligible for compensatory credits towards an award of a Certificate or Diploma.

- One member of the Senate commented that the SCQF level descriptors for level 11 set the criteria at quite a high level.

- In regard to the SCQF criteria, it was commented that alignment with these would increase standards and the standing of the degrees awarded by the University. It was however noted that the University may need to look at its admission criteria to ensure that it was admitting students who had the potential to achieve a Master’s degree.

- It was noted that the current criteria had led to a large number of postgraduate student appeals and representations against termination of study. In this regard, it was noted that it can be very difficult to explain to a student who has passed that they are not eligible to progress. In this regard, concern was expressed that the current procedures may unfairly disadvantage international students and therefore may raise issues of equality and diversity.

- One member of the Senate proposed that if the proposals were accepted a fundamental review of the CAS descriptors would be required. He stressed that it would be important that this be done in a co-ordinated way.

- One member of the Senate stressed, in the context of appeals, that there was an urgent need to review the Grade Spectrum.

- It was commented that the SCQF is based on a credit accumulation system. In practice, while Certificate, Diploma and Master’s Degrees should all be at level 5 (SCQF level 11), it was noted that the current practice in the University does not treat all these awards at the same level.
• One member of the Senate stressed that the *status quo* was indefensible. She stressed that the current system could not be described in a clear and transparent way and that this is especially difficult in regard to students staring their studies in January.

• In supporting the proposed changes, a member of the Senate queried what would happen to those students achieving a CAS 6, 7 or 8. In response, it was noted that such students would be eligible for a degree of compensatory credit towards the achievement of a Certificate or Diploma.
• One member noted that having initially been sceptical about the proposals, he had been convinced by the logic presented and the clear need to align with the SCQF.
• A student member of the Senate stated that there was a need to address some bigger questions such as the University’s admission criteria, the changing demographics of the student population and teaching and skills development towards the achievement of graduate attributes.

75.4 In drawing the debate to a close, the Senior Vice-Principal proposed a vote on the proposals. The motion was carried with only three votes against.

**ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**

76. The Senate approved the University’s Reflective Analysis (RA) document which will be submitted in advance of the University’s forthcoming Enhancement-Led Institutional Review in March and May 2010.

**VALIDATION OF THE UHI SUBJECT AREA OF HISTORY**

77.1 The Senate approved the recommendation that the UHI subject area of History, based at the Centre for History, North Highland College, be validated to deliver the research degree programmes of MLitt, MPhil and PhD.

77.2 The validation would remain in force for five years from date on which final approval is given by Senate. The report from the validation panel is available at [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/)

**REPORT FROM THE UCTL**

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 27 January 2010:

1. **Amendments to Regulations**

78.1 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committees, the Committee approved amendments to regulations as detailed in the Omnibus Resolution which enacts the changes in Degree Regulations recommended by the Academic Standards Committees since March 2009

2. **Amendment to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline**

78.2 Following a request from the Directorate of Student Services, the Committee approved an amendment to the discipline procedures relating to non-academic offences committed in University Halls of Residence. The amendment introduces three different classes of breaches in discipline which will be dealt with by different categories of staff, with differing levels of penalty available at each level. The changes have the effect of widening the pool of staff who are permitted to investigate alleged breaches of discipline and impose an appropriate penalty. The range of penalties which may be imposed are not changed in any significant way. An Anex to the code has been introduced which contains examples of the types of behaviour falling into each of the three classes. It is anticipated that this change will result in alleged offences being
dealt with in a more timely way, with the intention of minimising disruption to those resident in halls.

3. Interim Report from the Working Group on the 
   Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF)

78.3 The Committee noted the main findings of the Working Group, so far, regarding the current 
   SCEF system, as follows:
• Paper-based system – not environmentally friendly;
• Time-consuming process for written comments to be transcribed before dissemination;
• Closing the ‘feedback loop’ can be tricky;
• Difficult to maintain the feeling of anonymity of response, particularly in a small group setting;
• Feedback from students, particularly free text comment, is not as useful as it might be;
• Disparity between Academic Quality Handbook recommendation re response rate and the reality experienced across the University.

78.4 Discussion amongst the Committee centred round the advantages and disadvantages of an online system i.e. online system vs. paper-based system. The Committee agreed that choosing a particular format/style was an important part of the review process but agreed that paramount to all of this was ensuring that the University continues to engage with students to ensure responses are received and feedback is given to them

4. Interim Report from the Working Group on the Common Assessment Scale (CAS)

78.5 The Committee noted that the Working Group had identified a number of key issues that they were focusing on. The central concern being addressed by the Group is to ensure transparency in any amended system to ensure that students, parents, employers etc recognise and understand the achievement levels attained. The Committee were broadly supportive of the Group’s proposal to replace the current 21 point CAS scale with a 15 point alphanumeric scale for reporting assessment outcomes. The Committee noted that the mechanism for combining marks for separate pieces of assessment had yet to be considered by the Group, however, the Committee were in agreement with the Group’s view that in adopting any amended system it would be important to ensure that the methodology for combining marks is such that it would be possible to implement it across the institution.

5. Immigration and student monitoring update

78.6 The Committee noted the introduction of monitoring procedures for both postgraduate taught and research students, in addition to those already in operation for undergraduate students. The Committee further noted that Registry would be visiting Schools and Departments to talk them through details of the operation of the monitoring system for postgraduate students.

78.7 The Committee noted that the system being implemented was an adaptation of the current undergraduate monitoring system, operating slightly differently at postgraduate level. The Committee further noted that the proposal was as a result of UKBA requirements and that a monitoring system had to be put in place.

6. Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2010

78.8 The Committee noted that this was the first time that the University had chosen to participate in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) which is intended to help institutions enhance the quality of the PGT experience by collecting feedback from current PGT students in a systematic and user-friendly way. The Committee noted that the inclusion of institution defined additional questions was permitted and that these would be defined prior to the survey being opened to students.

78.9 The survey period stretches from 15th February 2010 to 28th May 2010, following general discussion, the Committee agreed that the University Survey would be opened to students at the University of Aberdeen on 4 April 2010.
7. Enhancement-led Institutional Review

78.10 The Committee noted that the Reflective Analysis to be submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency was being finalised; a previous draft of this had been considered by UMG and Senate in November 2009. The Committee further noted that a third draft of the reflective analysis would be available shortly.
8. Writing-up year for research students

78.11 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the Committee approved a proposal to amend the regulations governing Research students, relating to the writing-up period.

9. Amendment to standard terms governing offers

78.12 The Committee noted and approved amendments to Standard Terms Governing Offers of Admission for undergraduate and PGDE students and postgraduate students. The change is being made in order to ensure the institution is not disadvantaged, financially, should information come to the attention of the University that subsequently impacts on the fee status awarded and therefore the fees due.

10. Change in A-Level entry requirement for Medicine for entry in 2012 and beyond

78.13 The Committee noted and approved the proposal to increase A-Level entry requirements for entry to Medicine from September 2012 and beyond. The amendment approved the increases the requirement from AAB at A-Level to AAA at A-Level.

DEGREE HOODS FOR THE DEGREES OF MSCI, MPHYS AND BDS

79. The Senate approved the proposed hoods for the Degrees of Master in Science (MSci), Master of Physics (MPhys), Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) and the exit award of Bachelor of Dental Science (BDentSci) as detailed below:

- Degree of MSci and MPhys – the current hood for the Degree of Master of Chemistry (MChem) to be used for all undergraduate integrated Masters degrees;
- Degree of BDS – black silk lined with Bold Red silk;
- Degree of BDentSci – black silk lined with Bold Red silk and edged with green silk.

PROPOSED REVISIONS TO STATUTORY INSTRUMENT
1992 NO. 2704 EDUCATION (MODEL EMPLOYMENT STATUTE)

81. The Senate approved the Draft Ordinance (Revised Employment Statute).

REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR

81. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee agreed at its meeting on 26 January 2010 to defer any further discussion in regard to the Review of the Academic Year for 18 months given other conflicting priorities.

REPORTS FROM THE ASCS – COURSE AND PROGRAMME CHANGES

82. The Senate noted the changes to the list of courses and programmes approved by the Academic Standards Committees at their recent meetings, available at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/report
SENATE APPOINTMENTS

83. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved the following appointments:
To the Gifford Committee:
• Professor Catherine Wilson, Regius Chair of Moral Philosophy, School of Divinity, History & Philosophy
• Professor Blair Smith, Chair in General Practice, School of Medicine & Dentistry
• Dr Adam Price, Reader, School of Biological Sciences

To the UHI Academic Council:
• Professor Lewis Ritchie vice Professor Bryan MacGregor

To the UHI Research Council:
• Professor Paul Thompson vice Professor Bryan MacGregor

To the Committee on Research, Income-Generation and Commercialisation:
• Professor Stephen Reid vice Professor Kevin Edwards
• Professor Ruth Ross vice Professor Gary Macfarlane

POLICY ON ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT COMPLAINTS

84. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved minor revisions to the Policy (and accompanying Guidance Notes) on Academic Appeals and Student Complaints to widen the scope of who can investigate the initial formal stage of an Academic Appeal or Student Academic Complaint from a Vice-Principal to a Vice-Principal or any academic member of the Senate Business Committee.

CONFERRAL OF DEGREES AT UHI GRADUATION CEREMONIES

85. The Senate is invited to note that the Senate Business Committee approved the following form of words to be used at UHI Graduation ceremonies where no senior member of the Senate is available to attend to confer the degrees. The student’s degree would be conferred in absentia through normal channels.

“I present to you these candidates, proved after assessment to have qualified for the award of a degree/degrees of the University of Aberdeen, which will be conferred in due course/was conferred on [date].”