

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

**Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2009**

*Present:* Professor Logan (Convener), Professors Houlihan, MacGregor, Morgan, Rodger and Ross, Dr P Ziegler, Professors Black, Secombes, Imrie, Salmon, Cotter, Walkden, Wallace, Naphy, Dr B Connolly, Professor Edwards, Dr D Hendry, Dr K Shennan, Professor Long, Mr A Arthur, Professor Hutchison, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Professor Schaper, Mr DC McMurtry, Mrs A Valyo, Professor Saunders, Dr J Stewart, Dr A Campbell, Professor Duff, Mr S Styles, Dr A Arnason, Dr D Galbreath, Dr AD King, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr P Fraser, Dr L Hastie, Professor D Robinson, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Young, Dr I Greig, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr B Müller, Dr D Scott, Dr J Cleland, Professor Smith, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Professors Chandler and Watson, Dr D Jolley, Professor Anderson, Dr T JF Norman, Dr SP Townsend, Professors Fynsk and Webster, Mr R Parker, Mr J Simpson, Mr A Wilson, Ms C Duncan, Ms H Whiteley, Mr Y Volvyne, Mr D Naismith, Mr D Kurlberg, Mr J Wakefield, Mr S Fiddes, and Ms K Ross (in attendance)

*Apologies:* Principal, Professors Haites, Gane and Crotty, Ms M Pearson, Professors Ingold, McCaig, Greaves, MacDonald, O'Donoghue and Nelson, Mrs L Johnson, Mr MJ Radford, Professors Ritchie and Burgess, Ms C Banks, Dr M Mills, Mr C Munro, Mrs F Payne, Dr J Ravet, Dr A Gordon, Dr H Hutchison, Mr N Curtis, Dr A Jack, Dr N Vargesson, Dr T MacFarlane, Dr H Wallace, Professor Reid, Dr T Mighall, Dr N Spedding, Dr J Skakle, Mr R Rajendran, Ms L Bruce and Ms T Smith

At the start of the meeting, the Senior Vice-Principal informed the Senate that the Principal had sent his apologies as he was away from the University on personal business.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

55. The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2009 were approved.

**STATEMENT BY SENIOR VICE-PRINCIPAL**

- 56.1 The Senior Vice-Principal welcomed new members, particularly new student members, to their first meeting.
- 56.2 He drew member's attention to the report from the University Court and, in particular, the report on the appointment of the Principal. He informed the Senate that Professor Diamond would be joining the University in July 2010 as Principal-Designate and would take up his appointment as Principal on 1 October.

**UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM**

- 57.1 The Senior Vice-Principal invited the Vice-Principal (Curriculum Reform) to update the Senate on progress in regard to 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 process of implementation was progressing well. He informed the Senate that proposals for a streamlined Implementation Board would be brought to the next meeting of the Implementation Board in December. This change reflected the increasing move to embed the process of implementation into existing processes. He reported that the development of the eleven Sixth Century Courses and the thirteen Sustained Study Programmes were progressing well. A small group would be visiting the Scottish Funding Council on 4 December to discuss the University's bid for £4.9M funding.

57.2 He further informed the Senate that other universities were starting to undertake curriculum reform, the most recent announcement being from Warwick. He reported that Manchester University was well advanced in its plans and would be visiting the University. He also reported that a review of progress in regard to the 52 recommendations was being carried out and the timetable for the next stages of implementation was being prepared and would be published early in the New Year. He also informed the Senate that an element of the Curriculum Reform process would be used as a Case Study in the forthcoming Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). He finally reported that the Curriculum Reform process would be subject to an internal audit in early December.

## **ADMISSIONS REPORT**

58.1 The Senior Vice-Principal invited the University Secretary to present the report on Admissions (copy filed with the Principal copy of the Minutes). The University Secretary gave a brief summary of the full-time admissions at the start of academic year 2009/2010. He informed the Senate that home undergraduate admissions had been strong largely due to a cap being placed on admissions in England. Many of those admitted through Clearing had been highly qualified. He informed the Senate that the admission of postgraduate taught (PgT) students had been less positive, with particular challenges in the international PgT recruitment. He informed the Senate that the University's experience was mirrored in some but not all other universities. Analysis was ongoing to try to identify the reasons for the under performance in PgT recruitment.

58.2 There followed some questions, the main points of which are summarised below:

- It was queried whether the increase in undergraduate recruitment was solely positive or whether it had had any negative implications. In response, it was noted that it had led to the University meeting its target in some key areas but it had overshot in some other areas which may mean a clawback penalty of circa £200K. However, notwithstanding any financial penalty, the increased admissions would mean that going forward student numbers would be more buoyant avoiding less chance of losing funded places in the future. It was also noted that the increased admissions had led to some accommodation issues but these had been managed well and all those affected were well informed.
- It was queried whether the increase in admissions would have a risk in regard to retention. It was suggested that efforts should be made to ensure that the new entrants were appropriately supported.
- It was queried whether the University would be seeking a similar level of admission going forward. In response, it was noted that it was intended to maintain the population at funded levels going forward but to avoid going over target. It was further noted that it would be important to maintain the same level of intake in priority areas but that a different approach might need to be taken in non-priority areas as the University traditionally meets target in this area.

## **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY**

59.1 The Senior Vice-Principal invited the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning to present the report on the National Student Survey (NSS) (copy filed with the Principal copy of the Minutes). In doing so, he informed the Senate that the NSS was one of the benchmarking tools used by the University and more widely by the sector. He drew the Senate's attention to the 89% overall satisfaction which placed the University as 18<sup>th</sup> equal out of the 155 universities which took part. He highlighted that the survey outcome had been circulated to Colleges and informed the Senate that Colleges had been asked to provide feedback to the UCTL at their February meeting in regard to implementation of actions taken to address areas of

concern identified in the survey. He informed the Senate that the main areas for action were in regard to (i) assessment and feedback and (ii) advice about course choice.

59.2 There followed some brief questions, the main points of which are summarised below:

- It was queried whether some incentive should be offered to students to encourage them to participate in the survey. In response, it was noted that some areas did achieve a high response rate and there may be value in identifying if there is any good practice in these areas which might be used to improve response rates in those where there has been less engagement. It was further stressed that showing students the value of participation was important. The President of the Students' Association proposed that the SA might assist in promoting the value of the survey to students by working with staff and class representatives.
- Some queries in regard to the detail of the data were asked. It was noted that the data was based on FTE student numbers.

### **ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**

60. The Senior Vice-Principal invited the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning to update the Senate on the University's preparations for the forthcoming Enhancement-led Institutional Review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (copy filed with the Principal copy of the Minutes). He informed the Senate that the University was scheduled to undergo ELIR in March / May 2010. He stressed that this process was looking at a high level at the University's processes in three areas: (i) the management of the student learning experience; (ii) monitoring and review of quality and standards; and (iii) the strategic management of quality enhancement. He highlighted to the Senate the process of preparation of the University's Reflective Analysis document which would be submitted in advance of the ELIR Team's visit. In this regard, he informed the Senate that the draft document which had been produced following extensive consultation would be made available to the University Community following the Senate and that staff and students would be invited to comment (copy available at [www.abdn.ac.uk/elir](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elir)).

### **REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR**

61.1 The Senior Vice-Principal invited the Vice-Principal (Research & Commercialisation) to present the Review of the Academic Year (copy filed with the Principal copy of the Minutes). In presenting the report, he informed the Senate that discussion of proposals to review the academic year had been ongoing for some time. He stressed that in considering the proposals being presented, the Senate was being asked to take a decision as to whether to the academic year should be revised for 2010/2011. In opening the debate on the proposals presented, he highlighted that the driving force behind the proposals was a move to bring exams before Christmas which it was felt would help to address student retention.

61.2 There followed a wide ranging discussion, the main points of which are highlighted below:

- It was proposed that the impact of the move to the new structure would be significant and would, for example involve a move from 12 to 11 weeks teaching which would mean revising courses. Given this, it would be impossible to deliver the new structure for September 2010. It was proposed that time should be taken to have a more informed debate before making any change.
- It was commented that January can be an 'odd' month with students away for a three week vacation over Christmas followed by a week of revision and then exams. Many students finish exams before the end of the examination period and therefore have another break before the start of the second half-session. It was queried whether many students actually take proper advantage of the opportunity to reflect on their studies over the Christmas period before the exams.

- A student member commented that she had studied at Edinburgh where exams are before Christmas and was now studying at Aberdeen. She indicated that she did not see a significant benefit in having exams before Christmas. While it would mean students having a proper break over the festive period, the Christmas period before exams did allow time to study.
- The marking deadline for the first half-session was queried. It was proposed that it might be more realistic for this to be at the end of the first week of the second half-session to allow sufficient time for marking. In this regard, it was noted that the new model would reduce the current conflict of marking and teaching at the start of the second half-session which was felt to be a positive move.
- The proposed reduction in the late registration period was queried. It was suggested that it would be difficult to operate different models for Home/EU and non-EU students and, in this regard, it was proposed that it should be retained at three weeks. It was noted that this had been proposed for academic reasons but that the longer period had been retained for non-EU students on account of Tier 4 changes.
- It was proposed if Easter was to fall in term-time that a long weekend might be appropriate.
- The SA President indicated that the principle of exams before Christmas would be highly beneficial as it would enable students to have a proper break over the festive season and would also enable Erasmus students to take exams before returning home. He stressed that his main area of concern would be a reduction in teaching from 12 to 11 weeks and the impact this might have.
- Concern was expressed at difficulty of trying to introduce such a change alongside the other significant changes taking place due to the ongoing implementation of the Curriculum Reform recommendations.
- Support for the proposals was expressed. It was however stressed that the short timescale for implementation being proposed may be unrealistic. It was suggested that the implementation be delayed until 2011.
- Support for the reduction in the late registration period was expressed although it was proposed that this might be retained for first year students. Concern was expressed at the impact the proposed earlier start date might have on the opportunity for PgT recruitment, particular given the time required for international students to secure a visa. In regard to any reduction in teaching time to 11 weeks, it was stressed that this would reduce the opportunity for Schools to have 6 weeks blocks of teaching which provide more concentrated time for field work and laboratory classes.
- Support for the proposals was expressed although not for a 2010 timescale. It was stressed that flexibility should be maintained for Schools to retain 12 week's teaching as this time was required to cover the necessary teaching material particularly where students have no prior knowledge of the subject area.
- It was commented that it might be appropriate to move to a two week late registration period with flexibility provided to deal with late entrants outwith this period on an ad hoc basis.
- In regard to the August resit period, it was noted that there are some programmes where Schools would be willing to allow a student to progress without taking an August resit and would allow them to make up any shortfall of credits at the appropriate exam diet in January or May.

- It was commented that a move from 12 to 11 weeks would reduce the quality of the student experience. It was queried whether there was any evidence to support the perceived value in terms of retention of moving exams before Christmas. It was further queried whether any modelling had been done to ascertain whether there would be sufficient teaching space if the curriculum was to be compressed into 11 rather than 12 weeks.
- In regard to PgT students, it was stressed that it can be a challenge in terms of recruitment to get students to Aberdeen by the end of September. Any move to bring forward the start of term would put further pressure on this already pressured area of recruitment. It was further commented that it would be inappropriate to increase the late registration period to 3 weeks rather than the 2 weeks which had been used for this year. It was stressed also that the opportunity for reflection and revision over the Christmas period was valuable for PgT students particularly international students who often take time to settle into their studies. It was proposed moving exams before Christmas might impact in a negative way on the progress of students from Diploma to Master's stage.
- A member of the SA commented that moving exams before Christmas would reduce the time for study from 16 to 12 weeks. It was proposed that success rates may fall as a consequence. It was further proposed that the 11 week structure would provide less flexibility e.g. for missed lectures. It was suggested that more time be taken to seek student opinion.
- It was queried what impact the proposals would have on the MBChB curriculum. In response, it was noted that this would not be affected as it already operates on a different timetable.
- It was noted that a weakness of the current system is that students receive feedback on their first half-session exams after they have started on their second half-session courses.

61.3 Following lengthy debate, the Senior Vice-Principal drew the discussion to a close. In doing so, he asked the Senate to vote on two issues. He first asked the Senate to vote on the proposals as set out in the paper with a proposed implementation of the recommendations in September 2010. This proposal was unanimously rejected by the Senate. He then invited the Senate to vote on, in principle, on the move of exams to before Christmas. This was supported by a majority of Senate members (35 for versus 25 against).

61.4 The Senior Vice-Principal thanked the Senate for the helpful debate and stated that further proposals would be brought back to the next meeting.

### **REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS**

62. The Senate approved revisions to the Senate Standing Orders (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

### **SENATE POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC APPEALS COMMITTEE AND SENATE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' PROGRESS COMMITTEE**

63. The Senate approved revision to the composition of the Senate Postgraduate Academic Appeals Committee and the Senate Postgraduate Students' Progress Committee (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

### **REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meeting on 29 September 2009, as under:

## **1. Appointment of the Principal**

- 64.1 On 9<sup>th</sup> December the Court agreed to establish a Committee to recommend an appointment to the Office of Principal. The Committee met on four occasions between January 2009 and September 2009. A firm of executive search consultants, Saxton Bampfylde were also appointed to assist the Committee in conducting an international search for candidates. Extensive consultation took place as part of the process by which the job description and key attributes expected in the next Principal were drawn up. Advertisements of the position were placed in the UK and USA press and on the web. The University and alumni community were invited to submit nominations.
- 64.2 A total of 228 applications and nominations were received through the course of the search process. Seven candidates were long-listed and visited the University on an informal basis, following which five candidates were invited to formal interview in September 2009.
- 64.3 The Committee for the Appointment of the Principal agreed unanimously to recommend to the University Court that Professor Ian Diamond FBA AcSS be appointed Principal of the University. The Court agreed unanimously to approve the recommendation that Professor Ian Diamond be appointed Principal from an effective date of 1 October 2010. To aid transition Professor Diamond will be Principal-Designate from 1 July 2010.
- 64.5 Professor Diamond is presently Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and also Chair of the Research Councils UK Executive Group (the body representing all seven UK Research Councils).
- 64.6 He graduated in 1975 with a BSc (Econ) Honours from the London School of Economics and Political Science followed in 1976 with an MSc Statistics also from LSE. Professor Diamond graduated PhD Statistics in 1981 from the University of St Andrews.
- 64.7 Professor Diamond began his academic career in 1979 as a Lecturer in the Department of Actuarial Mathematics and Statistics at Heriot Watt University before moving a year later to the University of Southampton to take up a Lectureship in the Department of Social Statistics from which he was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1988. In 1989 he was awarded a Senior Research Fellowship in the Department of Demography, Australian National University. In 1992 Professor Diamond was appointed to a Chair in the Department of Social Statistics in Southampton and became Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1997. In September 2001 he was appointed to the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Southampton, a position he held until December 2002 when he took up appointment as Chief Executive of ESRC.
- 64.8 Professor Diamond's references testified to his exceptional personal, academic and leadership qualities and skills which were demonstrated very effectively in his meetings with the Committee.

## **2. Review of Committee Structure**

- 64.9 The Court, having consulted with the Senate and the Business Committee, approved revised proposals for a new University committee structure. The proposals had been revised to take account of comments received in the consultation, particularly the need to provide further detail on the lines of accountability for the functional areas of committees that were proposed to be removed from the governance structure.
- 64.10 The Court also noted that after a year there would be a review of the operation of the new arrangements for these areas represented by Joint Committees of Court and Senate being removed from the governance structure.

### **3. Amendment to Ordinance No 138 [Amendment to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus]**

64.11 The Court approved a recommendation from the Senate to amend Ordinance No 138 [Amendment to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus] and to formally submit this to the Privy Council upon the conclusion of the statutory period for public display within the University.

### **4. Re-accreditation of the UHI Millennium Institute**

64.12 The Court approved a recommendation from the Senate that the UHI Millennium Institute be re-accredited to deliver research degree programmes in specified academic areas for a period of five years.

### **5. Validation Agreement with Al-Maktoum Institute**

64.13 The Court approved a recommendation from the Senate that the Validation Agreement with the Al-Maktoum Institute, Dundee, be renewed for a period of three years to run from 1 October 2009 to 30 September 2012.

## **REPORT FROM THE UCTL**

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 4 November 2009, as under:

### **1. Proposal to establish a General Degree of Master of Arts (Part-time)**

65.1 The Committee considered details of a proposal from the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) to establish a General Degree of Master of Arts (part-time). The College of Arts and Social Sciences reported that discussions with Schools within the College to establish the programme were well underway. Current work is focusing on identifying the disciplines to be involved, possible modes of delivery and the potential structure of the programme. The Committee were supportive of the development and requested that the College and CLL keep them informed of the progress of development.

### **2. Changes to Undergraduate Requirements for 2011 entry**

65.2 On the recommendation of the Student Recruitment & Admissions Service, the Committee approved a proposal to increase the currently advertised A Level Entry Requirements for MA and BSc degrees for entry into first year from CCC to BBB. The change brings the degrees into line/closer to the entry requirements set by Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews and other comparable institutions in an attempt to attract an increase in applications from A Level candidates.

65.3 In addition the Committee approved amendments to the entry requirements for the degrees in Engineering:

To keep in line with the proposed changes for first year entry to BSc and MA degrees, Engineering the Committee approved the following:-

MEng – BBB including Maths and (Physics or Engineering or Design Technology)

BEng – BBB including Maths and (Physics or Engineering or Design Technology)

(Currently, A Level entry requirements for MEng and BEng are BCC and CCD respectively)

65.4 UCTL also approved A-level entry requirements for the newly introduced MSci Biological Sciences meantime, as BBB.

- 65.5 It is intended that the A-level entry requirements for MChem, MPhys, MSci (including the newly introduced degree) and BSc Biomedical Science be reviewed in the near future, in order to re-establish the former deferential between the requirements for entry into these degrees and those for entry into the degrees of BSc and MA.

### **3. Learning and Teaching Operational Plan**

- 65.6 The Committee approved the Draft Operational Plan for 2009/2010. The Convener explained to the Committee that there had been a full consultation process with several sections within the University contributing, including the Directors of Teaching and Learning, Centre for Learning & Teaching, Careers and Registry. The Committee were informed that the draft plan had been taken to Heads of School meeting for comment and that, following that, changes had been incorporated.
- 65.7 The Committee noted that the plan contains many of the development themes that are being taken forward as part of Curriculum Reform.

### **4. Piloting the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)**

- 65.8 The Committee approved a proposal from the Business School to adjust the entry requirements, on a pilot basis, for the MSc International Business, Energy and Petroleum, and MSc International Business and Finance to allow for the submission of a Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) test score as a supplementary aid for application decisions.

### **5. Sustainability Social Responsibility and the Curriculum**

- 65.9 The Committee considered a paper submitted on behalf of the University's Corporate Social Responsibility Steering Group. The Committee noted that there is increasing recognition within the sector that the sector's contribution to the sustainability agenda should reflect all aspects of core institutional business and hence includes teaching output. The Committee agreed that this was clearly an issue which should be discussed further and that detailed information, including specific proposals for consideration, should be brought to a future meeting.

### **6. UKBA and Resits**

- 65.10 The Committee discussed possible approaches to meeting UK Borders Agency (UKBA) requirements. UKBA require that, going forward, the University does not continue to sponsor migrant students who 'have already twice failed a re-sit, or twice repeated a period of study'. Current University policy, for undergraduate students, permits students up to three opportunities to resit. Given that current policy conflicts with the UKBA requirements, the Committee agreed that policy should be amended for all students, not just those subject to immigration control. It was agreed that the necessary amendments to regulations would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

### **7. Curriculum Reform**

- 65.11 Following previous consideration at the University Committee on Teaching & Learning, the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board and College Teaching and Learning Committees, the Committee approved the following items:
- (a) Strategy for the identification and dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching 2009-10
  - (b) Institutional framework for the provision of feedback on assessment

## **8. Amendments to the Academic Quality Handbook**

65.12 The Committee approved amendments to sections 9 and 10 of the Academic Quality Handbook.

- (a) Section 9 External Examining
- (b) Section 10 Collaborative Arrangements

## **9. Exam Deadlines**

65.13 The Committee approved the latest dates for the return of examination results for session 2009/10.

## **10. Deadline for Class Certificate refusal**

65.14 The Committee approved the recommendation that the deadlines for notification to the Registry of the refusal of Class Certificates, to those students previously reported as “at risk” under the Student Monitoring Scheme, be as follows:

First half-session courses: 5.00 p.m. on 22 December 2009 i.e. on the Tuesday  
(other than those below) following the last day of teaching

Second half-session courses: 5.00 p.m. on 8 May 2010 i.e. on the Tuesday  
(other than those below) following the last day of teaching

MBChB programme: 5.00 p.m. on the Tuesday following the last day of Teaching  
i.e.:

Phase I	18 May 2010
Phase II 2M	8 June 2010
Phase II 3M	23 February 2010
Phase III	8 June 2010
Phase IV	8 June 2010

## **REPORTS FROM THE ASCS – COURSE AND PROGRAMME CHANGES**

66. 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>

## **PRIZES AWARDED 2008/09**

67. The Senate noted that the list of prizes awarded in 2008/09 is available on the web at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/prizes.shtml>

## **MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES**

68.1 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 2009/10 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minute).

- 68.2 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the following appointments:

Trustee of City of Aberdeen Endowments Scheme for a period of 3 years – Dr S Townsend  
Gifford Committee – Dr N Price  
Geddes-Harrower Committee – Dr N Price

#### **ELECTION OF NON *EX-OFFICIO* MEMBERS TO THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS**

69. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the following timetable for election of non *ex-officio* members to the Senate to fill the small number of existing vacancies as follows:

Friday 20 November 2009	Issue of Nomination Forms to eligible staff
Wednesday 2 December 2009	Submission of Nominations to the University Secretary
Friday 4 December 2009	Issue of Voting Papers to eligible staff
Wednesday 16 December 2009	Submission of Voting Papers to the University Secretary

The closing time for receipt of Nominations and Voting Papers to be 5.00 p.m.

Eligibility to propose candidates, stand and vote, in the election would be open to all academic and research staff of Grade 6 and above who are not members of Senate *ex-officio*.

#### **VALIDATION AGREEMENT WITH AL-MAKTOUM INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES**

70. The Senate noted that at its meeting on 14 September 2009 the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the Validation Agreement with Al-Maktoum Institute for Islamic Studies for a period of three years from 1 October 2009. This agreement was drafted following a re-validation visit on 20 August 2009 and supersedes the existing validation agreement which expired on 30 September 2009.