

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2008

Present: Professors Logan, Houlihan, Ms CA Macaslan, Professors Gane, MacGregor, Morgan, Mrs M Ross, Professor Fynsk, Ms M Pearson, Professors Black, Imrie, Salmon, Cotter, Walkden, Wallace, Naphy, Long, Dr DC Hendry, Professor Burgess, Ms C Banks, Mr A Arthur, Professor Hutchison, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr M Mills, Professor Schaper, Mr DC McMurtry, Mrs A Valyo, Dr A Gordon, Dr H Hutchison, Professor Saunders, Dr J Stewart, Professor Duff, Dr A Arnason, Mr N Curtis, Dr P Fraser, Dr L Hastie, Professor Robinson, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Young, Dr I Greig, Dr A Jack, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr D Scott, Dr N Vargesson, Dr M Crilly, Professors de Bari, Liversidge, Dr T MacFarlane, Professor N'Dow, Dr M Psatha, Dr G Shirriffs, Dr ER van Teijlingen, Dr P Benson, Dr R Bull, Dr D Pearson, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Professor Chandler, Dr T Thevar, Dr T Mighall, Dr N Spedding, Professor Anderson, Dr SP Townsend, Mr D McKay, Ms J Elliott, Mr K Naismith, Mr J Collins, Ms L Bruce, Mr P Sheshadri and Mr S Doolin with Mr N Edwards in attendance

Apologies: Professors Haites, Ingold, MacDonald, Nelson, Rodger, Dr P Edwards, Dr P Mealor, Mrs F Payne, Mr C Munro, Professor Carty, Dr D Galbreath, Dr AD King, Dr J Cleland, Professor Smith, Dr H Wallace, Professors Guz, Reid, Dr D Jolley, Professor Price, Dr J Skakle, Professor Webster, Ms T Smith. The Senior Vice-Principal in opening the meeting gave the Principal's apologies as he was out of the country on University business.

MINUTES

2. The Minutes of the meetings held on 11 June 2008 and 29 October 2008 were approved subject to amendment to the first sentence of Minute 1.5 (iv) of the Minute of 29 October 2008 to read: 'A request from the student members that mechanisms be provided to ensure that they are part of the implementation process and that there is student membership of the Resources Group'.

THE YEAR AHEAD: REPORT FROM THE SENIOR VICE-PRINCIPAL

- 3.1 The Senior Vice-Principal gave a short presentation to the Senate setting out the challenges in the coming year. A copy of the presentation is appended to the principal copy of the minutes.
- 3.2 Following the presentation, there followed a short discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:
 - Concern was expressed that the Taskforce recommendations may not necessarily recognise the place of culture and the humanities in the economy. In response, it was noted that this point had been stressed in responses to the draft Taskforce report. It was further noted that the Taskforce report does recognise the role of HE in the culture of society. It was also noted that this point should be borne in mind in regard to the development of the Strategic Plan for 2010 to 2015.
 - The position of HE as the 7th sector of the Scottish economy was queried. In response, it was noted that in economic terms universities would be regarded as £2 billion plus businesses, and are a key part of the supply train of graduates and knowledge transfer. It was further queried whether the establishment of HE as a 7th sector of the Scottish economy would definitely happen. In response, it was noted that the Taskforce report was likely to be adopted. It was, however, acknowledged that HE unlike other industries could not be tasked with generating such a high level of income. Furthermore, the Government would need to recognise the impact of lack of resource on the sector. It was noted that the balance of General versus Horizon funding was likely to be a greater concern.

- The impact of the credit crunch was queried. In response, it was noted that the University had no investments in any Icelandic banks. The University is in a relatively healthy financial position and has secured favourable borrowing rates.
- The impact of the change in the immigration rules on international student recruitment was queried. In response, it was noted that the change would affect all HEIs. The University was keeping abreast of the changes with a view to remaining as competitive as possible. It was noted that in the current economic uncertainty and with these immigration changes that diversity would be important to ensure that any risk is spread.
- The mechanism for distribution of the Horizon Fund was questioned. In response, it was noted that this would be a matter for the SFC. It was anticipated that the fund might be closely linked to government priorities such as research pooling.
- The position of the University's 10 year Capital Plan in the current economic environment was questioned. In response, it was noted that the University's £5million surplus was incorporated into the Capital Plan. The University has capacity to borrow, but care would need to be taken to avoid over-borrowing and ensure the maintenance of surplus going forward. The Plan had been reviewed in the light of the decrease in costs of borrowing and building and in light of the decrease in value of land. The revised plan would be considered by the Operating Board.

CURRICULUM REFORM

- 4.1 The Vice-Principal (Curriculum Reform) drew to Member's attention the paper setting out the Curriculum Reform Commission's response to the issues which had been raised by the Senate at their last meeting (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). In doing so, he informed members that the Commission had also considered a number of further comments submitted by Senators following the meeting on 29 October and also the outcome of a student survey conducted by the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy. He informed members that the Commission had given thorough consideration to the points raised by Senate and that one amendment to Recommendation 37 regarding timetabling was proposed. He further informed Senate that UMG were in the process of considering the approach to implementation. He also informed Senate that he had also reported to UNCC and the Risk Management Committee and would be attending a meeting of the UCU.
- 4.2 The Senior Vice-Principal then invited the Senate, for its part, to approve, in principle, the Recommendations set out in the Curriculum Reform Commission's Report. There was unanimous approval from those present.

ADMISSIONS REPORT

- 5.1 The University Secretary briefly presented the Admissions Report for 2008/09. In doing so, he highlighted the following main points:
- There had been an encouraging increase in undergraduate admissions by over 3,000, which represented an 8% increase in comparison to last year.
 - Applications had fallen slightly and hence this increase in admissions was due to enhanced levels of conversion.
 - For the third year in a row, there had been a fall in science applications and once again the target had not been met. This area of concern had been discussed in detail at the recent meeting of the Student Recruitment & Admissions Committee. At this meeting it had been felt that the target of 700 for science admissions was no longer sustainable.
 - Postgraduate registrations had been very encouraging and were 35% higher than the same time last year.
- 5.2 Following this presentation, there followed a short discussion, the main points of which are detailed below:
- It was queried how the targets are established. In response, it was noted that these are agreed in discussion with Schools.

- One Senator queried whether the shortfall in science admissions was a local problem or one more widespread and asked whether actions proposed in Curriculum Reform might positively impact on science recruitment. In response, it was noted that this was a generic problem but that this had been compounded by the removal of the cap on funded places which had led to institutions such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews over-recruiting in science from what is a future pool.
- It would be important for the University to look for ways to differentiate ourselves and increase our attractiveness. The Curriculum Reform proposals should contribute to this. It was further noted that a number of initiatives including new degree programmes were being considered by the College of Physical Sciences and Life Sciences & Medicine.
- The slight under-recruitment in Law was noted to be due largely to higher than expected number of no-shows or early withdrawals. Looking to the future, it would be important to take account of such trends when planning future recruitment strategies.
- It was proposed that the University should seek to capitalise on the local area's profile as Energy Capital and look to promote programmes in areas such as oil and gas, and business.
- The changing school curriculum was also noted to be an area which the University should look to engage with more proactively. The Curriculum for Excellence changes to S4 to S6 curriculum may provide opportunities for the University to provide greater input into school teaching and so enhance students' transition from school to university. In addition, the new Baccalaureate may provide a clearer route for direct entry into level 2.
- One Senator suggested that it was easier for science students to make the transition to Arts rather than vice versa. He therefore suggested that there might be value in giving Arts students a year of science to open up the route to science. It was noted that the enhanced study provision in Curriculum Reform may help in this way.
- The level of students taking up part-time study was queried. It was noted that the part-time numbers through the Centre for Lifelong learning had increased by 150 bringing the population to around 700.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

6.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) briefly presented the outcome of the National Student Survey conducted in 2008 (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). In doing so, she highlighted the following key points.

- There had been a modest increase in response rate from 57% to 61%. Work would be required to try to increase this further for future surveys.
- The University had ranked 10th in the UK and 2nd in Scotland for student satisfaction with 91% expressing satisfaction with their course compared to 88% in 2007, and a sector average of 83% and a Scottish average of 86%.
- The range of open comments indicated a high overall level of satisfaction, positive comments regarding the approachability, enthusiasm and helpfulness of staff and flexibility of provision. There remains, however, in line with the sector, negative comments in regard to assessment and feedback. It was noted that this would be a theme for development in the coming year as part of the Learning & Teaching Operational Plan.
- She encouraged Schools and Colleges to consider the data provided, particularly that at discipline level.

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

- The survey results were very positive and we should recognise this feedback.
- The discipline breakdown of data was queried. It was suggested that it would be helpful to Schools to have more detail on the way such groupings had been determined. The size of the sample was also noted as the relatively small sample sizes in discipline level data would limit the reliability of the data. It was noted that the NSS data is only one part of the information used to measure student satisfaction.

- It was suggested that the written comments provided by students can be more valuable than the statistical data.
- It was proposed that Schools should be asked to review their approaches to student feedback and also encourage to more actively engage with the ongoing SPAR QS project on student feedback. In response, it was noted that this would be being taken forward through actions set out in the Learning & Teaching Operational Plan.
- The availability of data in regard to postgraduate student satisfaction was queried. While it was noted that some information is provided through the International Student Barometer, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to invite the Postgraduate Strategy Advisory Group to consider this matter.

BASELINE REPORT ON QUALITY ARRANGEMENTS

- 7.1 The Senate approved the Baseline Report on Quality Arrangements (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). In doing so, they noted that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) had asked all Higher Education institutions (SFC circular 30/08 – Council guidance to higher education institutions on quality) to provide, by 31 December 2008, a summary statement which explains how the institutional governing body satisfies itself that there are appropriate processes in place with regard to the assurance and enhancement of educational provision within the institution.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

1. Curriculum Reform

- 8.1 The Senate noted that the Court had approved, in principle, the recommendations of the Final Report of the Curriculum Commission.

2. Governance Reform

- 8.2 The Senate noted that, on the recommendation of the Governance Committee and following consultation with the Senate, the Court had approved the establishment of an Operating Board and the abolition of the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee.

3. Rocking Horse Nursery

- 8.3 The Senate noted that the Court had endorsed a motion in regard to University Nursery provision, which included a request for the Court to incorporate a level of financial provision for adequate nursery provision within the University's Capital Expenditure Plan.
- 8.4 The Senate noted that the Court had noted that proposals for future nursery provision were under consideration and were expected to be included in the next iteration of the capital plan in the course of 2008/09.

4. Election of Senate Assessors on Court

- 8.5 The Senate noted that the Court had noted that Professor N R Webster from the School of Medicine had been appointed to serve as a Senate Assessor to Court from 1 October 2008 until 30 September 2012.

5. Resolution No 257 of 2008 [Code of Practice on Student Discipline]

- 8.6 The Senate noted that the Court, on the recommendation of the Senate, had approved the draft Resolution [Code of Practice on Student Discipline], setting out a number of revisions to the Code of Practice, which related to the way allegations of plagiarism against students, registered in postgraduate programme year five, were handled.

6. Resolution No 258 of 2008
[Regulations for the Degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery]

- 8.7 The Senate noted that the Court, on the recommendation of the Senate, had approved the draft Resolution [Regulations for the Degree of Dental Surgery].

7. Resolution No 259 of 2008
[Changes to the Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery]

- 8.8 The Senate noted that the Court, on the recommendation of the Senate, had approved the draft Resolution [Changes to the Regulations for the degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery].

8. Resolution No 260 of 2008
[Election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus]

- 8.9 The Senate noted that the Court, on the recommendation of the Senate, had approved the draft Resolution [Election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus]. The revisions proposed were to reflect the necessary amendments to the distribution of seats on the Senate, which would result from the merger with the Rowett Research Institute.

9. Joint Degree Awarding Powers

- 8.10 The Senate noted that the Court had noted that The Academic Awards and Distinctions (Additional Powers of the University of Aberdeen Order of Council 2008) had been passed and would come into force with effect from 1 September 2008.

10. Ordinance No 139
[Incorporation into the University of Aberdeen of the Rowett Research Institute]

- 8.11 The Senate noted that the Court had noted that Ordinance No 139 [Incorporation into the University of Aberdeen of the Rowett Research Institute] had been passed by the Privy Council on 11 June 2008.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Points Based Immigration System

- 9.1 The Senate noted that the UCTL had considered the new Points Based Immigration System currently being implemented. The UCTL had noted the institutional responsibility and accountability in terms of managing admissions and attendance of international students. The UCTL had noted that the University will be required to report to the UK Borders Agency any unauthorised student absences (10 expected interactions). The UCTL had noted this would require substantial changes to the current student monitoring system in order to cope with this requirement. Following further discussion it was agreed that an update on the planning process be brought to the UCTL in February 2009.

2. Update on Personal Development Planning for Undergraduates

- 9.2 The Senate noted that the UCTL had received an update on Personal Development Planning (PDP) for undergraduate students. The UCTL had noted that although PDP had developed substantially over the past year, it was still very much in the developmental stages. The UCTL was reminded that the enhanced online PDP ePortfolio system was made available to both Level 1 and 2 undergraduate students during the last academic year and was currently being piloted at postgraduate level in the College of Life Science and Medicine. The UCTL had requested further details regarding the actual uptake and usage of PDP.

3. Draft Learning and Teaching Operational Plan

- 9.3 The Senate noted that the UCTL had approved the Draft Operational Plan for 2008/2009. The Convener had explained to the Committee that there had been a full consultation process with several sections within the University including Heads of Graduate School, Director of Teaching and Learning, CLT, Careers and Registry. The UCTL was informed that the draft plan had been taken to Heads of School meeting for comment and that, following that, changes had been incorporated.
- 9.4 The UCTL had noted key changes within the plan and key additions incorporated this year.
- 9.5 The UCTL had further noted that the plan contains many of the development themes that are endorsed within the final report of the Curriculum Commission.

4. Report from the Working Group on Academic and Pastoral Support.

- 9.6 The Senate noted that the UCTL had received an oral report from the Convener of the Working Group on Academic and Pastoral Support.
- 9.7 It was noted that the Group was currently reviewing the support systems and key themes which have arisen so far include: pre-September contact with students; desirability of one-on-one adviser-advisee meetings; the relationship between induction and advising; development of a 'one-stop shop' for central support services; co-ordination of support available within Colleges, Schools and disciplines; and appointment and training for advisers.
- 9.8 It was agreed that there would be a further update from the Working Group at the next meeting of UCTL in February 2009.

5. Update on Class Representative System

- 9.9 The Senate noted that the UCTL had received an update in relation to the Class Representative System.
- 9.10 The UCTL had noted the increased promotion of the class representative system by the Students' Association. It was noted that the Students' Association has decided to use the expertise of sparqs to create a set of toolkits that can be used at the School level for staff and students to reflect upon and improve their individual practices in student engagement, and in particular how best to elect class representatives. This would hopefully help alleviate the difficulty in obtaining class representatives.

6. Curriculum Reform

- 9.11 The Senate noted that the UCTL had discussed the Final Report of the Curriculum Commission. The main issues highlighted by the Committee related to the Implementation Group and how the Group would interact with existing structures and procedures/functions within the University i.e. University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) and Academic Standards Committees (ASC), and the resource implications in a learning and teaching context.

7. Term Dates

- 9.12 The Senate noted that the UCTL had approved the Dates of Term for 2009-2010, and provisionally those for the sessions to 2018-2019.

8. Exam Deadlines

- 9.13 The Senate noted that the UCTL had approved the latest dates for the return of examination results for session 2008/09.

9. Deadline for Class Certificate refusal

- 9.14 The Senate noted that the UCTL had 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: (other than those below)	5.00 p.m. on 23 December 2008, i.e. on the Tuesday following the last day of teaching
Second half-session courses: (other than those below)	5.00 p.m. on 19 May 2009, i.e. on the Tuesday following the last day of teaching
MBCbB programme	5.00 p.m. on the Tuesday following the last day of teaching i.e.:
	Phase I 19 June 2009
	Phase II (2M) 9 June 2009
	Phase II (3M) 3 March 2009
	Phase III 9 June 2009
	Phase IV 9 June 2009

REPORT FROM THE STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

1. Class Representative System

- 10.1 The Senate noted that the Student Affairs Committee had received an oral report from the Vice-President (Education & Employability) of the Students' Association regarding the current class representative system. It was reported that 300 representatives had been trained this year and that this had highlighted a need for a more strategic and robust system to be established.
- 10.2 It was agreed that the Vice-President (Education & Employability) would investigate how the Universities across Scotland operated their Class Representative system and the outcome of the investigation would be reported to the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL).
- 10.3 A report on the Class Representative system was also considered by the UCTL on 5 November 2008.

2. Timetabling

- 10.4 The Senate noted that the Student Affairs Committee had received an oral report from the Vice-President (Education & Employability) of the Students' Association regarding the students' position on the current room booking system, which was not a timetable package *per se*. The students felt that the current system required review and that rooms should be evaluated for their purpose.
- 10.5 The Student Affairs Committee noted the students' position, highlighting that a review of the timetabling system would be a matter for the Implementation Group under curriculum reform.

REPORTS FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES – COURSE AND PROGRAMME CHANGES

11. The Senate noted that the changes to the list of courses and programmes approved by the Academic Standards Committee at their recent meetings, were available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/report>.

ELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS TO THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS

12. The Senate noted that the following had been elected to serve on the Senatus Academicus with effect from 1 October 2008 to 30 September 2012 (unless otherwise stated) in the constituencies stated:

Business School Constituency

Professor N Hutchison
Dr J Lamb
Dr W David McCausland

School of Biological Sciences Constituency

Professor D Robinson
Dr M Delibegovic

School of Divinity, History and Philosophy Constituency

Dr M Mills

School of Education Constituency

Mr C Munro

School of Engineering Constituency

Professor H Chandler
Professor I Guz (to 30 September 2010)
Professor S Reid (to 30 September 2010)
Dr T Thevar
Professor J Watson

School of Geosciences Constituency

Dr D Jolley
Dr T Mighall

School of Law Constituency

Mr S Styles

School of Medicine & Dentistry Constituency

Professor C de Bari
Professor S Heys
Dr M Psatha
Professor M Rogers
Professor Blair Smith
Dr H Wallace

School of Psychology Constituency

Dr P Benson

Rowett Research Institute of Nutrition & Health Constituency

Dr L Williams
Dr S Duthie

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

- 13.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the membership of Senate Committees, Joint Committees of Court and Senate, and Committees of the Court with Senate representatives for 2008/09.

- 13.2 The Senate further noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the appointment, on the recommendation of the Head of the College of Arts & Social Sciences, of Professor T Salmon as one of the Governors of the John Reid Trust Scheme (*vice* Professor A Black).
- 13.3 The Senate further noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the re-appointment of Mr S Cannon as a Governor of Strathallan School.

ACADEMIC DRESS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EdD)

14. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the academic dress for the Degree of Doctor of Education (EdD) as follows:

The Doctor's scarlet cloth gown distinguished by orange silk facings and sleeve linings. Sleeves will have an orange tassel and button, and John Knox cap. Hood would be scarlet cloth, lined with orange silk.

DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES (EDUCATION)

15. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the appointment of Mrs L Clark as Acting Director of Undergraduate Programmes (Education) *vice* Mrs L Stephen.