

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2015

Present: Principal, Professors Haites, Hannaford, Greaves, MacGregor, Ross, Morrison, Craig, Gimlin, and Mr M Whittington, Professors Baggs, Jolley, Guz, Lumsden, Davies and Dr C Kee, Professors, Masthoff, Dr M Ehrenschwendtner, Dr S Lawrie, Professor Lurie, Professor Coghill, Mrs L Tibbets, Dr J Lamb, Professor Buckland, Dr A Sim, Dr A Dilley, Dr P Ziegler, Dr Y Bain, Dr E Curtis, Dr A Halsall, Dr J Biggane, Dr A Simpson, Dr Z Yidhego, Dr L Bennie, Dr M Bain, Dr T Argounova-Low, Dr A King, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Pinard, Dr J Barrow, Dr A Rajnicek, Professor Teismann, Dr S Tucker, Dr M Delibegović, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr N Mody, Dr M Cruickshank, Dr R MacKenzie, Professor M Helfirch, Dr A Venkatesh, Dr S Fielding, Dr I Cameron, Dr K Foster, Professor A Lee, Dr F Thies, Dr N Hoggard, Professor Chandler, Dr Menshykov, Professor MacDonald and Dobney, Dr A Ebinghaus, Dr N Oren, Dr R Machpherson, Dr M da Silva Baptista, Dr B Martin, Dr W Vasonselos, Professor Hutchison, Dr C Brittain, Miss E Beaver, Mr R Henthorn, Mr L Fuller, Mr O Toloch, Miss Z Howell and Mr T Griffin-Walker

Apologies: Professors Kunin and McGeorge, Ms AM Slater, Professors Coyle, Morgan, McCaig, Macrae, Reid, Skakle, Wells, Brown, Gow, and Dr R Neilson, Professor Connolly, Dr K Shennan, Dr D Hendry, Ms M Beaton, Dr P Bishop, Mrs D Bruxvoort, Dr WD McCausland, Dr A Bryzgel, Professor Friedrich, Dr H Pierce, Ms S Cornelius, Professors Stollery and Mealar, Dr G Sharman, Dr K Groo, Dr A Lewis, Professor Duff, Dr M Mills, Dr D Lusseau, Dr D Scott, Professors Schwarzbauer and Heys, Dr K Khalaf, Dr L Aucott, Dr C Black, Professor R Barker, Professor Sahraie, Dr D Ray, Dr L Williams, Dr J Keifer, Dr A Akisanya, Professor Kashtalyan, Dr D Green, Dr C North, Professor Edwards, Miss A Pavelekova, Mr D Delelis, , Miss G Ivanova, .Miss J Killin, Mr K Strain, Mr J Squires, Miss K Gombert and Miss G Clarke

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 12.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2014. The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed and there were no matters arising.

PRINCIPAL'S INTRODUCTION

- 13.1 The Principal began by welcoming those present to the February meeting of the Senate, extending the welcome to those members newly elected. The Principal spoke of the recently received letter from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for academic year 2015/16, noting that the SFC was not yet able to indicate funding with regards to research. The Principal noted the content of the letter confirmed an expected decrease in funding of 1.8% due to the reduction for Rest of UK (RUK) students. The Principal continued by commenting that the Research Excellence grant is awaited, however, as indicated by the Cabinet Secretary in late November, there will be an overall reduction in funding across the sector from £296 million to £282 million. The Principal spoke of the potential challenges arising from this.
- 13.2 The Principal noted that from April 2016 there would likely be a 4% increase in salary budget over and above increments and percentage increase for 2015/16 as a consequence of a 2% increase to both USS payments and National Insurance. The Principal informed the Senate that the SFC had confirmed this increase as an efficiency saving. The Principal commented that while things would be tight in terms of funding, that the University remained owners of its own destiny in ensuring an increase in research grants and that those who attend the University have an excellent student experience, in turn increasing retention rates. The Principal conveyed to the Senate the good news of new grants received from bodies including the Medical Research Council (MRC), pointing to the Universities' Research Excellence Framework (REF) successes around impact.

- 13.3 The Principal spoke of recent conversations with the Students Association (AUSA). The Principal conveyed the beneficial nature of these conversations and the issues they highlighted. The Principal spoke of the need to think through how tutorials work across the Institution, noting that the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) was taking this forward for review. The Principal further noted work of Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) in investigating how best to interact with applicants to the University at the point at which they are made, or accept, an offer to attend the University, including those from different backgrounds, such as mature or international students.
- 13.4 The Principal thanked all those involved in the recent January intake of students to the University, commenting specifically on the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) welcome for students in Law and Business. The Principal informed the Senate that there had been accommodation available for all students who had requested it. With regards to the accommodation issues experienced in October 2014, the Principal commented that follow up as to the effects of the issue on those students affected was currently being undertaken and that initial analysis suggested no significant differences in marks received.
- 13.5 The Principal commented that the next meeting of the Senate would occur after the General Election and the potential impact of a new Westminster Government for Scottish Higher Education.

OUTCOME OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF)

- 14.1 The Principal, introducing the Outcome of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), commented that discussions were already underway regarding the revised form, if any, that the next REF would take. The Principal noted that HEFCE had discussed a policy of 100% inclusion. The Principal commented that the consideration of the role of citations may be reinstated, and there may be discussions regarding the introduction of a 'transfer window' which would eliminate late REF related moves. The Principal commented that there will be the opportunity to feed into discussions over time.
- 14.2 The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) presented the outcome of the REF. The Vice-Principal commented that the University did well, improving in almost all cases on grade average profile (GPA) and specifically performing well in the areas of the impact of research and environment. He commented that the University had performed less well regarding outputs. He noted that Aberdeen had performed top in the UK in the area of Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science and very well in the areas of Psychology, Architecture, Built Environment and Planning, and English.
- 14.3 While commending the University's results, the Vice-Principal commented that the University's competitors had also performed very well. Referring to the Times Higher Education top 400 Universities, he commented that 103 of the Institutions listed are within the US and 46 within the UK, illustrating that the UK is one of the most competitive higher education environments. The Vice-Principal acknowledged that institutions had different REF submission strategies, notably targeting 'glory' or 'gold'. He commented that the University had sought financial recompense in its submission. He commented that the University must be cautious of over interpreting any drops in ranking. While the University had performed well, it must seek to perform better in the next REF. He commented that a series of debrief sessions following the conclusion of REF had been undertaken, the engagement with which was proving very useful. The Vice-Principal commented specifically on the area of the impact of research, noting that while the University had done well in this aspect of REF, new case studies of impact would need to be sought.
- 14.3 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below.
- One member commented on an error in the HESA data used to interpret the REF results and queried whether the panel would have seen this data and subsequently marked the University down. The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) responded to apologise for the error, commenting that it had been rectified. Senate was further assured that the error although embarrassing, was not

detrimental in any significant way, since the data were not seen by the REF panels and the research intensity rankings derived from the data were new, not used by other league tables.

- Another member queried whether trends could be identified between this and previous REF submissions. The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) commented that such an analysis was difficult as factors such as the composition of panels and competitors involved varied between each exercise. The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) further commented, however, that the University must focus on excellence and submission volume in moving forward, with the aim to achieve a top 25 ranking in the 2020 round.
- Another member commented on the focus of some headlines on GPA, when percentage submission and the overall profile of a unit should be taken into account. The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) commented that areas of 2* or lower quality would need to be looked at.
- One member queried whether, if citations were to be reintroduced to the REF, how the 'life' of these would be determined. The Principal commented that extensive work into citations was being undertaken at the University of Sussex on behalf of HEFCE. The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) further commented that should they be used, citations would need to be discipline specific and, unlike in previous rounds, have demonstrable good correlation between ranking and citation.
- Another member commented on the University goal to submit at the next REF only 3* or 4* level research and whether appropriate resource was available to allow the achievement of this. The Principal commented that he believed the University had the resource and ability to do so.
- In concluding the Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) commented that a discussion would take place at the next Senate regarding REF and open access.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

- 15.1 The Principal updated the Senate on the development of the Strategic Plan. The Principal thanked all those who had attended and contributed to workshops held throughout the autumn, noting the constructive and supportive comments received. The Principal updated the Senate that Theresa Merrick, Director of External Relations, was undertaking the draft of a white paper to be discussed with students, staff and all University stakeholders. The Principal further noted that Jennifer Sewel, Director of Policy Planning and Governance, was convening a working group on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to advise the Operational Plan. The Principal acknowledged the importance of student retention and the student experience. The Principal informed the Senate that issues such as internationalism would be embedded throughout the Strategic Plan and not as a standalone heading.
- 15.2 The Principal urged members of the Senate to feed into the work being undertaken. Members were further informed that a draft plan would follow to the next meeting of the Senate.
- 15.3 One member of the Senate queried the inclusion of Environmental Sustainability in the Plan, noting it was not included as a subject header. The Principal acknowledged the importance of the issue in everything the University does and confirmed that, as with Internationalism, the issue would be embedded throughout the document.

PROGRESSION INTO HONOURS

- 16.1 Professor Lumsden, on behalf of the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) presented the issue of Progression into Honours to the Senate. Professor Lumsden noted that the issue had previously been considered and had returned for further discussion. The Senate were informed that the proposal now made specific reference to Integrated Masters programmes, where a hurdle between undergraduate and postgraduate study is considered to be appropriate.
- 16.2 Professor Lumsden informed the Senate of the proposals, recognising that the removal of CAS/CGS hurdles would improve transparency of undergraduate degrees, increase

consistency across the University and also ensure the University is in line with the requirements of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) which require only the achievement of credit points. Professor Lumsden acknowledged that it had been brought to the attention of the UCTL that CAS/CGS hurdles were, in some cases, being embedded in course pre-requisites as a means of a hurdle to honours entry. Professor Lumsden confirmed that this too would no longer be permitted under the proposals.

16.3 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below.

- One member of the Senate commented on the impression students may take from a lack of progression hurdle and that students achieving low grades on a repeated attempt may not recognise the demands of studying at Honours level. Professor Lumsden acknowledged this point and commented that communication with students remained of the upmost importance.
- One member commented that removing grade hurdles for entry to an honours programme would lower standards. The member continued to comment that a designated degree would be less labour intensive and a better qualification for students in this position, students who may even wish to return to Honours at a later date. Professor Lumsden acknowledged the anxieties associated with the proposal but noted that the majority of students who are asked to undertake a designated programme do go on to Honours after their third year.
- Professor Lumsden acknowledged a point made by a member regarding joint honours students and ensuring there remained a designated option for them. Professor Lumsden confirmed that students in this position would not be disadvantaged.
- One member asserted their agreement with the proposals and commented that students already have to meet entry tariffs for University entry. The member commented that these tariffs are on the increase in what they require and acknowledged that we currently recruit a very high standard of student as a consequence.
- One member also voiced their agreement with the proposal and emphasised the need, in some circumstances, for good academic advice.
- A member commented that students who fall short of the grade requirement to enter Honours are often motivated by their third year on the designated programme.
- The Senate were informed that the designated degrees would remain in their current form as exit paths.
- One member commented that the change could not lead to instances such as the classification of degrees on second or third attempt at assessment. Professor Lumsden acknowledged that the issue of classification was different as in doing so clear distinctions are appropriately made.
- Members of the Senate commented that the University should be confident in the material and learning outcomes delivered at level 2 in being an appropriate measure for honours entry.

16.4 The Principal thanked Senate for the helpful discussion, confirming that the proposal should proceed, with close attention paid to issues such as students on a joint honours degree programme.

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning at its meeting of 21 January 2015, as under:

1. Changes to General and Supplementary Regulations

17.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft Resolutions 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees' and 'Supplementary Regulations for the Degrees of Master of Arts (MA)' (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

2. Dates and allocations for June 2015 graduations

- 17.2 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had approved the dates and allocations for the June 2015 Graduation Ceremonies (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

3. Pre-requisite Grade Hurdles

- 17.3 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had approved a proposal to discontinue the practise of using CAS/CGS hurdles above a pass mark as pre-requisites for entry to courses.

4. Progression into Honours

- 17.4 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had considered a proposal to bring the University's undergraduate programmes in line with the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and with the progression rules for Postgraduate Taught programmes, by amending procedures for honours entry. The Committee were supportive of the proposal and agreed it should be forwarded to Senate for ratification.

5. Draft Enhancement-led Institutional Review One Year Follow-up Report.

- 17.5 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had considered the draft report which is due to be submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency in due course.

6. Revisions to the Course/Programme approval and change processes

- 17.6 The Committee discussed proposed revisions to the workflow, content and timelines associated with the processes for course and programme proposals and amendments. The Committee were supportive of the proposals which aim to create a more flexible and reactive process leading to the production of a finalised timetable by the end of the Spring Break prior to the start of the next session. The Committee noted, however, that any amendments to the existing process would be predicated on the availability of appropriate IT development and support.

7. Annual Course Review

- 17.7 Following discussions at the Meeting of Heads of School on 7 January 2015, the Committee approved amendments to the current form for Annual Course Reviews. The aim of the changes are to make the process less concerned with the statistical data associated with a course, and more focused on reflection by the course co-ordinator. To take account of these changes, further changes have been incorporated to the Annual Programme Review form.

8. Latest Date for the Return of Examination Results 2015/16

- 17.8 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had approved the latest dates for the return of examination results for 2015/16. The dates are available from <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/exam-results-and-change-of-marks-678.php>.

DRAFT ORDINANCE FOR EXTENSION OF UNIVERSITY POWER

18. The Senate approved the Draft Ordinance to seek extension of the University's powers to allow the establishment of a University of Aberdeen campus overseas.

The Senate further noted that the draft Ordinance has been sent to the Business Committee of the General Council and will be publicly displayed within the University for the statutory period. (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

ELIR ONE YEAR FOLLOW-UP REPORT

19. The Senate approved the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) one-year follow-up which is due for submission to the QAA in early March.

UCTL ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE

20. The Senate note the UCTL Annual Report to Senate for 2013/14.

RECTORIAL ELECTION

21. The Senate is invited to note that Maggie Chapman, Co-Convener of the Scottish Green Party has been elected as the new University Rector for a three year term of office with effect from 1 January 2015.

ELECTION OF NON *EX-OFFICIO* MEMBERS OF THE SENATE

22. The Senate noted that following have been elected to serve on the Senatus Academicus with effect from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2018 (except where indicated otherwise):

School of Biological Sciences Constituency

Dr J Baird
Mrs C Dennis
Professor D Johnson

Business School Constituency

Mrs L Tibbets (to September 2016)

School of Education Constituency

Professor P Mealar

School of Engineering Constituency

Professor M Kashtalyan
Dr O Menshykov

School of Geosciences Constituency

Professor K Dobney (to September 2016)
Dr A Ebinghaus
Dr D Green (to September 2016)
Dr C North

School of Law Constituency

Dr Z Yidhego

School of Medicine & Dentistry Constituency

Professor R Barker
Dr I Cameron
Dr K Foster
Professor A Lee
Dr F Thies

School of Medical Sciences Constituency

Dr N Mody

School of Natural & Computing Sciences Constituency

Dr M da Silva Baptista
Dr R Macpherson (to September 2016)

Dr B Martin
Dr W Vasconcelos

ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSOR TO THE UNIVERSITY COURT

23. The Senate noted that Dr N Oren has been elected as Senate Assessor to the University Court with immediate effect to 30 September 2018, in the College of Physical Sciences.