UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2014

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, Haites, Hannaford, McGeorge, Morgan, Wallace, Kunin, Greaves, MacGregor, Ross, Morrison, Craig, Coyle, Zalewski, Bender, Skakle, Soulsby, Guz, Lumsden, Davies, Wells and Schaper Dr R Neilson, Dr C Kee, Professor Connolly, Dr J Masthoff, Dr K Shennan, Dr M Ehrenschwendtner, Dr S Lawrie, Professor Coghill, Dr P Bishop, Professor Dawson, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr A Dilley, Dr D Robson, Dr DJ Smith, Dr Y Bain, Dr G Sharman, Dr K Groo, Dr T Burns, Dr D Hanschel, Professor Duff, Dr A Simpson, Dr L Bennie, Dr M Bain, Professor Lambin, Dr B Scott, Dr J Sternberg, Dr D Lusseau, Dr M Pinard, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Greig, Dr D Scott, Dr A Rajnicek, Professor Teismann, Dr A Denison, Dr S Fielding, Dr J Hussein, Dr H Galley, Dr S Semple, Dr J Kyle, Professor Heys, Dr C Black, Dr D Pearson, Dr D Martin, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Dr M Kashtalyan, Dr D Pokrajac, Professor Chandler, Dr A Akisanya, Dr L Philip, Dr A McLaughlin, Dr F Guerin, Miss M Dunn, Mr R Henthorn, Mr T Balsys, Miss HL Smith, Miss J Molyneux, Mr T Stephen, Miss J Franke and Mr M Amm

Apologies: Professor Rodger, Ms AM Slater, Professors Baggs, McCaig, Macrae, Reid, Gow, Professor Lurie, Dr D Hendry, Professor Coghill, Ms M Beaton, Mr L Bebbington, Dr R O'Connor, Dr A Bryzgel, Professors Friedrich and Mealor, Dr E Curtis, Ms S Cornelius, Dr T Wills, Dr P Bernhagen, Dr R Vij, Dr M Mills, Dr A Carrington, Dr J Barrow, Dr S Tucker, Dr J Cleland, Dr LP Erwig, Professor Schwarzbauer, Dr K Khalaf, Dr M Cruickshank, Dr L Aucott, Dr R MacKenzie, Professor A Sahraie, Dr J Keifer, Professor D MacDonald, Professor TFJ Norman, Dr N Oren, Professor Hutchison, Professor Edwards, Miss Z McKellar, Mr D Delelis, Mr R Islam, Mr H Naio, Miss T Womersley, Mr P McClenaghan, Mr A Swan, Mr S Gotsev, Miss L Nitsche, Mr S Adetola, Miss K Gombert and Mr B Amponsah

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

11.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2013. The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed and there were no matters arising.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

12.1 The Principal began by welcoming everyone to the first Senate of 2014 and he wished everyone a belated Happy New Year. The Principal welcomed Professor Seth Kunin, the new Vice-Principal for Internationalisation. The Principal said that this indicated the University's serious intent to pursue an international agenda. He urged people to meet with the new Vice-Principal and to work with him on the many recruitment agendas that were now progressing across the University. The Principal continued by saying that the new Deans of Internationalisation were now in place and working hard in their specific areas to improve international recruitment and outward mobility. The Principal concluded by emphasizing that everyone across the University must work together to improve internationalisation in research and for students.

12.2 The Principal noted the recent announcement of the European Commission's Horizon 2020 initiative, funding from which would become increasingly important given the drop in real terms in funding available from the Research Councils and received from the SFC. He insisted that it was now even more important that the University consider other sources of income. The Principal said that the University of Aberdeen was doing relatively well in gaining research funding but he encouraged everyone to do more, adding that it was everyone's responsibility to apply regularly for funding to a diverse range of sources. The Principal

thanked everyone who had contributed to the REF submission, adding that the University looked forward to December when it would receive the outcome.

12.3   The Principal stated that just before Christmas the UK Chancellor had announced extra places available in Higher Education in England and that the cap on entrance requirements to English universities had been removed. The Principal said he was fully supportive of this and it was an opportunity for those students from most disadvantaged backgrounds. He added, however, that it might squeeze the Scottish universities as they would now be more challenged in recruiting RUK students. The Principal said that the Marketing Team was looking at this challenge and how we might market Aberdeen in order to maintain our numbers of RUK students. The Principal said that Universities Scotland have argued for a removal of the cap on funded places in Scotland as well. The Principal went on to say that he had met with the new Chair of the Scottish Funding Council and that this had been a very positive meeting. They had discussed the criteria for widening participation and how these discriminate against those in rural areas in Scotland, especially Aberdeenshire. The Principal said he was now very positive about how things can move forward as the new Chair seemed very supportive of widening the definition of disadvantage.

12.4   The Principal announced that the University had received the letter from the Scottish Funding Council on our funding allocation. In real terms the University had lost funding with an overall increase in real terms of only 0.23%. Because of the significant increase in estate bills and the overall rise in the salary bill, there were challenges in meeting the budgets. The Principal added that while the rise in student tariff was a very good thing for the University in terms of the quality of its student population, the University faces significant challenges in terms of finances and the answer to this was for the University to think more about how it might diversify its funding streams.

12.5   The Principal announced that the University had received its renewal in the Investment in People award and that the accrediting body had been very positive about the University's safety culture and that the University was developing a new appraisal system. The Principal then announced that there was a new short-life Working Group on eliminating bureaucracy. The Principal encouraged people to put any issues to that Working Party in order that we all contribute to making the University less bureaucratic and more effective.

12.6   The Principal concluded his statement by talking of the Strategic Plan which, being from 2011 to 2015, was now due for updating. He said that it was now time to reconsider the Plan and that there would be the opportunity for wider participation across the University over the next few months. He urged everyone to be part of the discussion.

12.7   The Principal asked Senate if there was any questions. There were no questions.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

13.1   The Principal introduced the item on health and safety. He said that staff and students have the right to the highest level of health and safety at the University. He said that there were a number of bodies across the University that have responsibility for health and safety and that the culture within the University on health and safety is very good. He added, however, that the University needed to do more and he handed over to the Vice-Principal and Director of the Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health to make a statement.

13.2   The Vice-Principal said that the staff survey had received good feedback in relation to health and safety but that the University needs to take a stronger and more proactive approach. He said the University has strong leadership and management in many areas in relation to health and safety but said that the University needed clearer expectations of what can be done to improve things, adding that there should be complete transparency in the University's procedures and the University had to learn from its mistakes. He clarified that the University should be careful not to develop a blame culture but use the opportunity of transparent reporting to make improvements.

He said that a paper was being taken to the Operating Board at the end of the month. He then highlighted two accidents that had happened and that had resulted in staff needing more than seven days' absence. One of these members of staff had been knocked down outside the Library by high winds. As a result of this, the University had appointed engineers to investigate the wind problems around the library and what might be done to reduce the risks. He concluded by saying that this is the type of action the University needs to be taking so that it can learn from mistakes.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OUTCOME

14.1   The Principal began by saying the outcome of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review had been tremendous for the University of Aberdeen, adding that there were actions for development but the outcome demonstrated the quality of Aberdeen's work. He thanked all those who had been involved.

14.2   The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) outlined the report on the Enhancement-led Institutional Review 2013 (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal echoed the thanks of the Principal to everyone involved in producing the ELIR document and the evidence to support it. He said that the University had been deemed to be effective which was a very positive outcome and the highest outcome an ELIR can produce. He said the technical report had contained details of the areas highlighted for development, the Report appended being the summary report. The University now had an opportunity to respond to these items after which it would receive its final published report and it had already contacted the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for clarification on several issues. The Vice-Principal stated that one of the main areas for development is that the University is too slow in responding and in making change and that it needed to be much quicker in dealing with critical issues such as the reform of CAS and the Grade Spectrum. The Vice-Principal then opened the floor to questions.

14.2   There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below.
- One member thanked the Vice-Principal and asked whether he could clarify what was meant in the summary report when it spoke of strengthening the links between quality assurance and quality enhancement. He also asked what the mentioned successful initiatives might be. The Vice-Principal responded by saying it the QAA wanted the University to include more aspects of enhancement into the Universities quality assurance procedures – such as the Annual Course Review (ACR), the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) and Appraisal – and that the University should strive to provide better and more obvious links between quality assurance procedures and how that improves quality enhancement. He added that the University had been aware that it was not getting the full benefit of ITR because the procedure focussed on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON ASSESSMENT

15.1   The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) outlined the report on the Code of Practice on Assessment (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal started by saying most of the details were in the paper and that he would just go over the broad concept. He said that papers and revisions to reforms to the Common Assessment Scale (CAS) and the Grade Spectrum (GS) had been to Senate a number of times over the past 3 years. The ELIR Panel considered a reform of CAS to be critical and had asked the University to ensure their timely implementation. Following further review of the proposals presented to Senate in November 2012, a single Code of Practice was now presented which, it was thought, provided a greater degree of transparency and consistency across all aspects of marking and classification. The Vice-Principal said he hoped everyone had had a chance to read the paper as he would not go through it in detail – the Senate was asked to approve the seven points of the paper and particularly to consider the two points relating to weighting. The Vice-Principal then opened the floor to questions.

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

- One member commented that it was a very good and rich approach to marking and grading and felt that the 22 point scale was a great improvement on the previous CAS scale, particularly so as it came with better descriptors. He added that the only question he had was whether there should be weighting or not.
- Another member said the new method was very interesting and that it was good to have a grade point average and transparency. He asked for explanation on the 22 points and why the first class band had 5 points within it whereas the second class bands had only 3 points each. The Vice-Principal responded to say that the 5 points within the first class band were to allow the finer grading that can occur with these excellent levels of work. He pointed out that the University had always had more points within the fail band and that to have more points within the first-class band now balanced the scale. He hoped it would encourage people to make fuller use of the entire scale. He added that the idea was that staff should mark to the middle of the band initially and then to granulate towards the lower or higher points of the band based on the descriptors.
- Another member commented that it was a much clearer and transparent system and it was good that time had been taken to look at the descriptors for the bands. He did ask why the scale was alpha-numeric. He thought this was more complicated than necessary and asked why this had been chosen rather than a straight percentage scale. The Vice-Principal responded to say that this was an issue that was regularly raised and discussions on this showed a 50:50 split in whether not people wanted percentage scales. He said the alpha-numeric scale have a more meaningful descriptor for employers, for example, as it is understood what an 'A grade student' or 'B grade student' is whereas saying that a student achieved 65% was not so meaningful as this would be a different level of achievement for different disciplines and might not be understood by employers. He added that markers also rarely use all percentage points in a percentage scale tending to cluster.
- Another member commented that the transparency was excellent and agreed that the translation from percentage to alpha-numeric scale was better as in different countries there will be different percentages that equate to a pass. The member added that linking credits and elements of assessment to the courses was a far better system as it gave absolute transparency.
- Another member commented on the table of borderlines saying that although it was good to define these so that they were clear, the calculations for grade point averages were very complicated and not clear. He thought that a student probably would not be able to do them especially when there were different weightings for different courses. Another member said a ready reckoner would be helpful. The Vice-Principal agreed that a ready reckoner would be a useful tool and that that would be provided, he added that this was one of the reasons why weighting was not preferred as decreased transparency.
- One member commented that the A1 to A5 might not be clear to an employer, for example was A1 better than A5, and wondered if this was chosen because it was what other universities did. The Vice-Principal said that the system was used by other universities but that universities use many different systems. He thought employers would focus on the A and not the number.
- Another member thought that having a grade point allocation was good and that the overall scheme, especially having elements of assessment directly related to the credits and courses made it very clear to students what counts and towards what. He also added that it was an improvement that a failed course did not automatically lead to a student achieving no more than a 2:2. He said he would not be in favour of years being weighted differently as that would complicate things and make it more difficult to calculate classification. The Vice-Principal added that calculations by students would be difficult if there was differential weighting by courses or by level of study. He pointed out that the SCQF criteria regarding the difficulty of work according to level of study was in itself a weighting. He pointed out that the expectation of the SCQF is that 18 at level 4 is not the same as 18 at level 2 and therefore weighting might not be appropriate. He added the simplest solution was to have equal weighting of all courses and all years.
- One member agreed saying that the system had to be completely transparent and fair and that we owe it to our students to have such a system. He added that if the University decides to weight any factors then that can only be done if a consistent system is used across the whole University, with the same weighting system being used by all disciplines.

- Another member said that he was not sure that we could have consistency and classify all degrees in the same way as this will mean that the differences between degrees in the arts, for example, and the sciences are not taken of account of. He said there had to be a degree of discretion in how Schools decided to classify their degrees. The Vice-Principal pointed out that the University already has single scales for marking and classification. He added that although the style and type of work required for one discipline might be different from another, there are expectations in the sector that two students with the same mark at the same level – even though they might be in different disciplines – are of an equal level of achievement. He agreed with the member who said that if there were to be any weighting it would have to be the same across the entire university and that the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) would have a large role in agreeing to this.

- One member asked why there was no accounting for exit velocity in the criteria for classification and why there was a preference for no weighting. He said that Schools used discretion in determining exit velocity at the moment and wondered why this discretion had been taken away. Another member said that although discretion exists it has to be recorded. He said that if Schools wanted to give weighting to year 4 to account for exit velocity this would add too much messiness in understanding the calculation of the degree. The Vice-Principal responded to say that exit velocity had been taken out because it was a non-quantifiable construct, adding there was no consistent view across the University as to what constituted exit velocity. He said that many external examiners have questioned and criticised the University's use of exit velocity and course weightings because it results in a system that is opaque and inconsistent. Exit velocity was removed because it is impossible to define so cannot be part of a transparent calculation.

- One member asked how the system was more intelligible for international and European students. He said that it was not evident that employers would understand the alpha-numeric system. Vice-Principal said in discussions with employers and other universities it was clear that they struggle to understand the University's existing 20-point CAS. The Working Group had spoken with other universities that have 'grade point averages' and alpha-numeric scales and no particular issues had been found with such systems.

- One member commented on the changed policy on postgraduate taught resits and thought there should be the same policy for postgraduate taught as there is for undergraduate students. The Vice-Principal said there needed to be a separate discussion about that.

- One member asked how the new Code would be implemented. Would it be changed for all students so those currently here had their existing grades translated into the new system or would it just be for new students coming in. He said that would be very difficult for staff to mark students to two different scales and asked whether the University had planned how it would be done. The Vice-Principal said that there was still some discussion to be had with IT as our technical systems needed to be changed for the new marks to be entered. The Vice-Principal said, however, that the switch in marking will be relatively straightforward and it could be done immediately. How the new GS would be implemented needed to be further discussion.

- One member said that in CLSM although they liked the new system, there was strong support for relative weighting so that level 4 had a heavier weighting. The Vice-Principal asked for clarification asking whether it was for weighting of level 4 courses or that courses taken in year 4 counted for more than courses taken in year 4. The member clarified that he meant that level 4 courses count more than level 3. The Vice-Principal pointed out that the SCQF framework means that what is required for level 4 courses is more than what is required for level 3 courses, anyway, so there is an element of weighting that is inbuilt. He said that if there is a decision to weight courses then it must be University wide and that weighting cannot be different in different Schools or Colleges.

- One member thought that although there were benefits to the new system as it was a logical extension of a GPA approach but thought it was not necessarily transparent as people would not assume the marks were out of 23. He wondered whether the new system was simply shifting the process rather than actually addressing the issue of not having enough first class students.

- Another member commented that even though there were now 5 points within the first-class band few staff would actually award A1 or A2 because staff simply do not mark like that. He said that no more first-class marks will be given.

- Another member wondered if it would be better to give just a letter rather than a letter and a number because employers might not understand how an A1 student is better than an A5 student and wondered if the alpha-numeric system could be for internally use only. The Vice-Principal responded to say that the suggestion would be taken away for consideration.
- One member did not agree with weighting pointing out that if level 4 weighted more heavily than level 3 then students who were forced to take level 3 courses in year 4, for whatever reason, would suffer as a result.
- One member said that the paper was excellent and it was the first time he had seen the University attempt a proper system of a calculated mark and classification scale with clarity in relating marks to credits. He said he would not be happy with having different weightings between years because of the effect it could have on some students. The Vice-Principal responded to say that is why he had asked about whether weighting was wanted for year or level. If there is to be weighting it has to be for course level not year although he wished to avoid that given the increasingly cross-disciplinary aspect of students' degrees and the complications that course weighting would add.
- Another member agreed that if courses were weighted or if years were weighted there would be problems with enhanced study and how sixth century courses were weighted, for example, in different Schools. It would completely reduce transparency and consistency of the system.
- One member pointed out that in Psychology students have to take level 3 courses in their final year and they took more level 3 courses than level 4 courses. If there was any form of weighting that would discriminate against Psychology students.
- Another member asked whether there would be exemption for Medicine and Dentistry. The Vice-Principal pointed out that Medicine and Dentistry degrees were different. The Dental degree for example only having pass/fail.

3.3   There were no more comments. The Principal thanked members for their comments and support for the proposals saying that this had been an excellent debate showing Senate at its best. The Principal concluded by saying that the Vice-Principal would take on board the comments raised in moving forward with implementation.

UCTL ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE

16.1   The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) presented the UCTL Annual Report to Senate (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal said he would single out just a few points from the Annual Report. He said that there had been two successful teaching and learning symposiums that had been very well attended with a good range of new people attending them. He said that it was an important showcase of best practice and forum for discussion. He added that the ELIR review had pointed out that the University needs to be better in looking outside itself for best practice and for disseminating best practice that does exist across the University. He highlighted the increasing demand for the PgCert Higher Education Learning and Teaching (PgCert HELT). He also highlighted the '*You said, we did*' webpages. He said that it had become evident that students felt that the University did not act as a result of their feedback. In reality the University generally had acted but had not informed students of this. The '*You said, we did*' webpage was an attempt to address this problem. He reminded members that the SPSO had required the University to adopt a new Model Complaints Procedure, adding that the University now has to report all complaints, even informal ones. The Vice-Principal concluded by saying the National Student Survey is about to open and that the University is about to open its Institutional Student Survey. He asked whether there were any questions. There were no questions.

16.2   The Principal then asked Senate if it was happy to approve the report from the UCTL Annual Report under Item 7, Items for Routine Approval. The Senate was happy to approve.

REPORT FROM THE UCTL

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning at its meeting of 22 January 2014, as under:

1. Resits for Postgraduate Taught Students

17.1   The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, a change to current policy on resits for non-conversion postgraduate taught programmes.

2. Code of Practice on Assessment

17.2   The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had discussed the proposed Code of Practice on Assessment. The Committee was supportive of the proposal and agreed that, subject to some suggested amendments, the proposal should be forwarded to Senate for consideration.

3. Students' Association Representatives Reform Process

17.3   The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had discussed a proposal from the Students' Association (SA) for amendments to be made to the current Class Representatives system. The Committee noted that the SA is going to be involved in a further review which will be considering aspects of the system. It was, therefore, agreed that a further proposal should be brought to the Committee in the future, once the review has been completed.

4. Continuing Professional Development Framework

17.4   The Committee noted an update from the Centre for Academic Development on the decision to create a single, overarching Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for staff who teach and research at the University of Aberdeen (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes). It was further noted that implementation of the Framework would be overseen by the Centre for Academic Development's Advisory Board.

5. Term Dates

17.5   The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had approved an amendment to the term dates for 2014/15 for the BScMedSci, and term dates for level 5 of the MChem:

	BSc Med Sci	MChem level 5
Winter Term Opens	Monday 1 September 2014	Tuesday 9 September 2014
Winter Term Closes	Friday 19 December 2014	Friday 19 December 2014
Spring Term Opens	Monday 5 January 2015	Monday 12 January 2015
Spring Term Closes	Friday 24 April 2015	Friday 17 April 2015
Summer Term Opens	Monday 27 April 2015	Monday 27 April 2015
Summer Term Closes	Vivas held on 27th May 2015	Friday 22 May 2015

6. Latest Dates for the Return of Examination Results

17.6   The Senate noted, for its part, that the Committee had approved the deadline for the return of postgraduate taught course and programme results in 2013/14 to be Friday 24 October 2014. This date is now included with those published at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/exam-results-and-change-of-marks-678.php

ONESOURCE UPDATE

18.1   The Senate noted the update on progress in regard to the OneSource Student Lifecycle Project (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes).

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2014

19.1   The Senate noted the arrangements in regard to the National Student Survey which is due to launch on 3 February 2014 (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes).

SENATE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

20.1   The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate had approved the appointment of Professor Paul Nimmo and Dr Nathaniel Jezzi as members of the Gifford Committee *vice* Professor John Webster and Dr Robert Plant.

The Senate further noted that the Senate Business Committee also approved the appointment of Dr Richard Nielson as a representative from the College of Physical Sciences on the Committee for Research, Impact and Knowledge Exchange *vice* Professor Guz.