

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

**Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2014**

*Present:* Principal, Professors Logan, McGeorge, Greaves, MacGregor and Ross, Ms AM Slater, Professors Morrison, Craig, Gimlin, Bender, Skakle, Jolley, Lumsden and Brown, Dr R Neilson, Dr C Kee, Professor Connolly, Dr K Shennan, Dr M Ehrenschtendner, Dr D Hendry, Professor Coghill, Dr P Bishop, Mrs D Bruxvoort, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Professor Buckland, Dr A Sim, Dr A Dilley, Professor Friedrich, Dr H Pierce, Dr P Ziegler, Dr Y Bain, Dr E Curtis, Ms S Cornelius, Dr A Halsall, Dr G Sharman, Dr A Lewis, Dr L Bennie, Dr T Argounova-Low, Dr A King, Dr J Sternberg, Dr D Lusseau, Dr M Pinard, Dr A Rajnicek, Professor Teismann, Dr S Tucker, Dr M Delibegović, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr M Cruickshank, Dr L Aucott, Dr N Hoggard, Dr L Williams, Professor Chandler, Professor MacDonald, Dr N Oren, Miss E Beaver, Mr R Henthorn, Mr L Fuller, Miss A Pavelekova, Mr D Delelis, Miss J Killin, Miss Z Howell, Mr T Griffin-Walker, Mr J Squires and Miss G Clarke

*Apologies:* Professors Haites, Hannaford, Kunin and Coyle, Mr M Whittington, Professors Morgan, Baggs, McCaig, Macrae, Reid, Guz, Davies, Wells, Gow, Masthoff, Dr S Lawrie, Professor Lurie, Ms M Beaton, Dr A Bryzgel, Professor Stollery, Dr K Groo, Dr J Biggane, Professor Duff, Dr A Simpson, Dr M Mills, Dr M Bain, Dr J Barrow, Dr D Scott, Professors Schwarzbauer and Heys, Dr K Khalaf, Dr R MacKenzie, Dr C Black, Dr S Fielding, Professor Sahraie, Dr D Ray, Dr J Keifer, Dr A Akisanya, Professor Hutchison and Edwards, Dr C Brittain, Miss G Ivanova, Mr O Toloch, Mr K Strain and Miss K Gombert

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- 1.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2014. The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed and there were no matters arising.

**PRINCIPAL'S INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The Principal welcomed everyone to the first Senate of the new academic year and encouraged all new members to engage in the discussions and debate.
- 2.2 Before the start of business, the Principal invited the member who had requested to raise a question, to put the question forward. The member asked that Senate be informed of discussions that purportedly were taking place regarding the restructuring of the College of Arts & Social Sciences. The Principal responded by saying that the Operating Board was reviewing the operations of all three Colleges and that a paper would go to the Operating Board in November.
- 2.3 The Principal began by saying that the University would face very many challenges over the coming year, including that of the election in Westminster with no doubt that the current austerity measures would continue with the next Government. Challenges in obtaining research funding would continue as would those in recruiting rest of the UK and international students at all levels, the Principal reminded Senate that all staff needed to continue their efforts in gaining research funding from an ever-widening range of sources, especially the EU, though the possibility of a referendum on whether the UK would continue to be part of the EU might have an impact on the funding available. The Principal said that the University would need to focus on its strengths, especially in considering the new strategic plan, and to make providing a good student experience, reducing non-continuation and improving employment prospects high priorities. There would be a consultation on a HE Governance Bill all Scottish universities would need to think very carefully about their responses. The Principal extended congratulations to recent successes: Professor Ian Stansfield had led an undergraduate team that won a gold medal in the International Genetically Engineered Machine competition; staff from all three Colleges had contributed to a Real Estate competition in New York that had come fourth out of 17, beating Cambridge in the first round; and Professor Fred Glaser had

been awarded a major international research prize. The Principal concluded by saying that this would be the last Senate attended by the Senior Vice-Principal, Professor Logan, and he wanted to take this opportunity to thank Professor Logan for the wisdom, energy and strategic insight that he had brought to the Senate and to the wider University.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

- 3.1 The Principal made an oral report on the Strategic Plan. The Principal reminded Senate that the University needed to develop a new plan to commence in mid-2015. The new Strategic Plan needed to be a result of consultation amongst all stakeholders: staff, students and all who might have involvement. There had already there had been a number of meetings and all points raised at those meetings would be considered in the drafting of the new plan. Workshops were going on at the moment and there would also be web based sites where staff could input their ideas. It was planned that a white paper will be released for discussion in early 2015.
- 3.2 The Principal then asked for comments. There followed a discussion, the main points of which were as follows.
- One comment regarded the partnership between the University and the Students' Association and that the Plan should ensure that is embedded across teaching and learning and that the teaching and learning strand of the strategy should involve student input. The Principal responded that was indeed intended.
  - One member raised the issue of affordable housing as a challenge in Aberdeen for staff and students, adding that the NHS is considering adding salary supplements to enable people to move to Aberdeen. The Principal responded that housing was certainly one of the items on the University's agenda and not just as part of the Strategic Plan. There was a draft estate strategy that included student housing, with paper going to the Operating Board in 2-weeks' time. Part of the proposal was to build new halls of residence and flats for students or staff who had families. The Principal added that initial meetings have already taken place between the University, the City Council, NHS Grampian, Robert Gordon University and North East Scotland College to discuss the issue of affordable housing for staff and students in Aberdeen.
  - One member said they were pleased to see the principal of fairness, including entry into honours as raised in the report from the University Committee on Teaching & Learning. The member added that the University should also extend these principles to taught postgraduate, for example in things such as the teaching prize. The Principal responded by saying that a Taught Postgraduate Teaching Prize was now included from this academic year.
- 3.3 The Principal concluded the discussion on the Strategic Plan by reiterating his requesting that all members of staff contribute, either through one of the workshops, or online, or by emailing him directly.

## **STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

- 4.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) spoke to the paper on the Student Experience (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). There were very many positive things happening across the University and although there were challenges there were also a lot of positives. One challenge was that of outward mobility, especially given the recent EU report highlighting the importance of an overseas experience for students. The University needed to look very carefully at its partners, in order to have available for students the right curriculum, at the right time, and with the right partner, in order that as many students as possible could have an experience overseas. One challenge was students' marks whilst overseas. One option was that only the students' Aberdeen grades, and not the overseas grades, would be used in the calculation of classification, with students receiving relevant credits only for the period overseas. Another option would be to define clear grade mapping for all disciplines with each of the partners, though this would be highly complicated. Although the University attracted a large number of international students, many of whom did undertake a period

overseas, the University was less successful in encouraging home and RUK students to take up an overseas experience. The second challenge the Vice-Principal highlighted was that of retention. Retention figures had improved greatly and the University fully expected its retention rate to improve to 95% next year, with the detailed figures relating to retention being covered in the paper.

4.2 The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) then asked for comments. There followed a discussion, the main points of which were as follows.

- One member pointed out that lack of clarity regarding how an overseas experience might impact on their results was a huge concern for students and led to them lacking the confidence to go overseas. There was no clarity on the impact on their grades and degree overall, adding that if clarity could be given then numbers taking up an overseas experience would probably increase. It was also pointed out that students were asked to decide far too early in their studies - in the first half of their first year - whether or not they wanted to go overseas. Another suggested that an overseas experience needed to be seen in a broader context than study alone, with work experience or projects, for example, also counting as overseas experience. In Geosciences, for example, students had been going overseas to do projects or years abroad for 15 years and it was clear from statistics gathered over that period that students who had experience overseas were employed much quicker. The Vice-Principal agreed and said that this tallied with the wider research that had been done within the sector. One member pointed out that language was a huge concern though in response a member pointed out that many universities in Europe and Scandinavia are teaching in English. The Vice-Principal concluded by saying that the University needed to find a way to communicate this message to students.
- Another member pointed out it was important to encourage staff exchanges as if staff created links with institutions overseas then that would provide confidence for students who were wanting to go there. The Vice-Principal agreed that both aspects were critical.
- A member moved onto the point of SCEF returns and asked what the University could do about the nil returns on SCEF forms. The Vice-Principal said the University was currently working with Students' Association on that very issue.
- One member asked how the University was dealing with the contradictory statistics in the paper in relation to retention. For example, the figures showed that in History retention was quite low but satisfaction very high. The Vice-Principal said there might be issues with data definition, but said that low retention and high satisfaction were not necessarily contradictory as it might indicate that students who were not satisfied were leaving. One member pointed out that their School had the worst retention rates across the University and that it differed between the different disciplines within the School. The issues the School had identified were a sense of belonging, pastoral care, and subject expertise advice. There were also problems at entry where students felt they did not have the skills and knowledge they needed in their first year. It was also pointed out that retention was not just a short term issue and that the University needed to monitor the outcome of any interventions carefully to ensure there were long-term improvements. The Vice-Principal concluded by saying that three project working groups were being set up – all of which had student input - and he asked for the approval of Senate to take these forward. Senate agreed to this, the three project groups being 'Retention', 'Feedback and Assessment' and 'Positive Outcomes'.

## **STUDENT POPULATION 2014/15**

5.1 The Senior Vice-Principal spoke to his paper on the Student Population 2014/15 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). He added that the significant detail was in the paper and he would outline the main items only. Before giving his report, the Senior Vice-Principal thanked the Senate for its earlier warm response at what would be his last Senate. The Senior Vice-Principal reported that the early statistics showed there were just under 12,000 FTEs, with an increase in taught undergraduate and taught postgraduate and that postgraduate research was close to expectation. The University had met all of its targets in the non-controlled subjects and in most of the controlled areas (for example Medicine and Education) the University had met most of the targets though it had under recruited in

Secondary Education, as was the case across Scottish universities. The University's RUK student population had increased by 300 which was close to target, though the University has been less successful in retaining RUK students. The Senior Vice-Principal reminded Senate that in future the University would no longer get funding for RUK students and receive only fees.

### **SENATE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

- 6.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the Senate Business Committee, the proposals for a Senate Effectiveness Review, including the proposed remit and composition of the Review Group to oversee the process. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes.)

### **UNIVERSITY OF HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS REACCREDITATION**

- 7.1 The Senate approved, for its part, the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning that the University of the Highlands and Islands should be re-accredited by the University of Aberdeen for a period of a further 5 years for the delivery of research degree provision in specific validated areas. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes.)

### **BUREACRACY REVIEW UPDATE**

- 8.1 Senate noted the progress made to date in implementing the key recommendations of the Bureaucracy Review Working Group. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes.)

### **REPORT FROM THE UCTL**

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

#### **1. Dates and allocations for November 2014 graduations**

- 9.1 The Committee noted the dates and allocations for the November Graduation Ceremonies as summarised below, approved by the Convenor during the summer.

**Thursday 27 November at 11.00 a.m.**

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Language & Literature, Social Science and Law.

**Thursday 27 November at 3.00 p.m.**

Higher and First Degrees in the Business School, Schools of Divinity, History & Philosophy and Education.

**Friday 28 November at 11.00 a.m.**

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Geosciences, Engineering and Natural & Computing Sciences.

**Friday 28 November at 3.00 p.m.**

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Psychology, Medical Sciences, Medicine & Dentistry and Biological Sciences.

#### **2. Academic Flexibility for Elite/High Performance Sports**

- 9.2 The Committee approved a proposal to establish a process for a structured approach to facilitating and delivering reasonable academic flexibility for students who participate in High

Performance Sports, whilst preserving academic standards. The Committee agreed that, in taking forward the proposal's implementation, consideration be given to widening the recommendations contained within the proposal to other areas such as that of gifted musicians. An implementation programme, to include all elite activities, will be considered at a future meeting.

### **3. Progression into Honours**

- 9.3 The Committee approved a proposal to bring the University's undergraduate programmes more in line with the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and amend procedures for honours entry. The Committee agreed, in principle, that a consistent approach be adopted for all undergraduate programmes, and to solely require achievement of 240 credits across years 1 and 2 for entry to honours and that no additional grade hurdles be permitted. Proposals on the details of implementation will be considered at a future meeting.
- 9.3.1 At the meeting of Senate, a member put forward a comment on the Report from UCTL regarding point 3, Progression to Honours. The member commented that, if Schools were no longer permitted to have hurdles for entry into honours, this would present a significant problem as the current hurdles are an effective stick to get students to work hard for entry to honours. The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) responded by saying that this debate had taken place before, as well as for taught postgraduate, and that the argument to remove the additional hurdle was that the University already had a pass mark of CAS09, and that CAS09 indicated that a student had met all of the learning outcomes for that course. The Vice-Principal added that an additional hurdle beyond meeting the learning outcomes for the course would conflict with the SCQF and with the University's own definition of a pass. Another member said that his understanding was that the first and second year led to either an honours degree or a designated degree and that CAS09 indicated that a student had met the outcomes for a designated degree in which case an additional hurdle was required to meet the outcomes for an honours degree. The Vice-Principal responded to say that was not the case, adding that a student who achieves CAS09 might be on course for a third class degree but that it was an honours degree. The Vice-Principal added that students make a choice in their third year if they want to leave with a designated degree, but Schools should not be taking that choice away from them and should not be preventing third-class honours or lower-second-class honours students from continuing with an honours degree. One member pointed out that there were very many examples of students who struggled in years one and two for all sorts of reasons who had improved in years three and four, and that the University should not prevent these students from obtaining an honours degree. Another member pointed out that when their School had removed its requirement for students to obtain CAS12 to enter honours, overall classification averages rose. One member said that the proposal should come back to Senate for discussion. The Vice-Principal responded by pointing out that during progress through other University Committees, such disagreement with the proposal was not detected. Several other members commented that they fully supported the proposal.

### **4. Study Abroad**

- 9.4 The Committee considered a proposal which it was hoped would encourage more students to undertake a period of study abroad. Where a student undertakes a period of study abroad during their Honours years, it is proposed that their degree classification be determined solely on the basis of the results achieved at Aberdeen. The Committee noted that Heads of School discussed the proposal at their meeting on 15 October and their feedback on the issue would be fed into further discussion of the proposal at the next meeting. The Committee also agreed that no grade barrier (other than that of a pass) should apply for students wishing to undertake a period of study abroad, and that if concerns exist as to whether a student should be undertaking time abroad, these should be addressed at interview.

### **5. Undergraduate Resit Dates 2014/15**

- 9.5 The Committee approved the dates for the summer resit diet. Resits will take place from 27 June 2015 for a 2-week period, with the corresponding deadline for the return of marks being 24 July 2015.

#### **6. Centre for Academic Development Annual Report 2012/13**

- 9.6 The Committee considered the Centre for Academic Development Annual Report for Academic Year 2013/14. The Committee acknowledged the quality and extent of the work highlighted in the Report's content. The Committee agreed that the Report should be made widely available and be disseminated to colleagues with the Colleges as appropriate.

#### **7. Careers Service Annual Report 2013/14**

- 9.7 The Committee considered the Careers Service Annual Report for Academic Year 2013/14. The Committee noted the positive work being undertaken by the Service and the high level of interactions with the student population. The Committee further discussed the alumni discount offered to graduates of the University undertaking postgraduate study. The Committee agreed that the availability of this should be highlighted to students. The Committee agreed that the Report should be made widely available and be disseminated to colleagues with the Colleges as appropriate.

#### **8. Reaccreditation of the University of the Highlands and Islands to deliver research degrees**

- 9.8 On the recommendation of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) the Committee considered the Final Report and the Panel's recommendations regarding the renewal of the Accreditation Agreement with the University of the Highlands and Islands for the delivery of research degrees. The Committee approved the recommendation of the QAC that UHI should be accredited by the University of Aberdeen to deliver research degrees for a period of a further 5 years.

#### **RECTORIAL ELECTION UPDATE**

- 10.1 The Senate noted that two nominations for the post of Rector were received. The two candidates were Maggie Chapman, Co-Convenor of the Scottish Green Party and James Steel, a successful solicitor and tutor to law students. Campaigning would open on Monday 3 November with the elections taking place between 11 and 13 November. The outcome would be announced on Friday 14 November. [Following Senate, Maggie Chapman was duly elected as the new Rector of the University.]

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

- 11.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved the appointment of members to Senate Committees. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes.)