

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

**Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2013**

*Present:* Principal, Professors Logan, Haites, Hannaford, McGeorge, Morgan, Wallace, Greaves, MacGregor and Ross, Dr Morrison, Professors Craig, Coyle, Zalewski, Buckland, Baggs, Skakle, Soulsby, O'Donoghue and Lumsden, Dr S Davies, Dr R Wells, Professors Schaper and Dr J Masthoff, Dr S Lawrie, Mrs M Beaton, Dr M Ehrenschtendner, Dr K Shennan, Professor Dawson, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr A Dilley, Dr K Friedrich, Dr DJ Smith, Dr Y Bain, Dr E Curtis, Dr J Stewart, Dr G Sharman, Dr A Pillai, Professor Duff, Dr A Simpson, Dr L Bennie, Dr J Sternberg, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr I Greig, Dr J Barrow, Dr A Rajnicek, Dr S Fielding, Professor H Galley, Dr S Semple, Professor Schwarzbauer, Dr K Khalaf, Dr L Aucott, Dr R MacKenzie, Professor Newton, Dr S Duthie, Dr L Williams, Dr M Kashtalyan, Dr D Pokrajac, Professor Chandler, Dr J Keifer, Dr A Akisanya, Dr L Philip, Professor D MacDonald, Dr A McLaughlin, Dr F Guerin, Professor Hutchison, Miss AC Deseillingy, Miss J Bjorkqvist, Miss M Dunn, Mr M Kania, Mr R Henthorn, Miss HL Smith, Miss R Munday, Miss G Maerker, Miss Z McKellar,

*Apologies:* Professor Rodger, Ms AM Slater, Professors McCaig, Macrae, Reid, Gow and Nelson, Naphy, Dr B Connolly, Mr M Radford, Dr D Hendry, Professor Ritchie, Ms C Banks, Dr Bunduchi, Dr C Brittain, Dr R O'Connor, Dr A Bryzgel, Dr P Mealar, Dr D Robson, Ms S Cornelius, Dr T Wills, Dr K Groo, Dr T Burns, Dr P Bernhagen, Dr R Vij, Dr M Mills, Professor Lambin, Dr A Carrington, Dr D Scott, Dr P Teismann, Dr J Cleland, Dr A Denison, Dr LP Erwig, Professor S Heys, Dr M Cruickshank, Dr D Pearson, Dr D Martin, Dr TFJ Norman, Dr N Oren, Dr N Vargesson, Dr AD King, Professor Edwards, Miss CC Hunter, Miss L Reid, Mr HD Naio, Mr P Bond, Mr J Douglas, Mr M Burke, Mr J Kenter and Mr G Maloney

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- 16.1 The Senate was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2012 (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

**STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL**

- 17.1 The Principal welcomed the Senate to the first meeting of the year. He hoped that students had found they had done better than expected in the January examinations and thanked colleagues for the work that had been put into the organization, administration and marking of the examinations. The Principal reported that although numbers of applications had been down, they were now up by 7%, and the highest number of applications the University had had. He commented that this was testament to the quality and success of our marketing strategy. The next challenge would be to convert the applications into arrivals. The Principal thanked colleagues for the tremendous effort that was being put into the REF exercise. He reported that the University's research income continued to increase year on year, which was due to the work that had been done on research peer mentoring – from review of content to help with submission. He added that the University had a responsibility to continue to use research income wisely. The Principal reported that he had been pleased to receive the Vice-Principal's (Learning and Teaching) paper on Peer Mentoring, thanking particularly Drs Karen Salt and John Barrow for their work on this initiative, and noting that it should have very positive outcomes by improving retention. The

Principal stated that he welcomed responses from national level higher education agencies to the Scottish Government's Draft White Paper on Post-16 Education, especially the concerns that had been voiced regarding the weakening of academic freedom and of institutional autonomy. The Principal reported that he had been meeting regularly with the leaders of the University's Research Themes and was pleased to announce that 'The North' will become part of the 'Universities of the Arctic Network'. He continued by asking Senate to give thought to what might be our next generation of research themes. Finally, the Principal congratulated Professor Neil Gow, who has been awarded the 2013 Fred Griffith Review Lecture and David McNee and Sonia Watson, postgraduate research students, who won first place and runner up in the regional finals of the Famelab 2013 competition for the communication of science.

## **RESEARCH STRATEGY**

- 18.1 The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) updated the Senate on the draft Research Strategy (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). He reported that the University Court had held a strategy day in September. For that meeting he had produced a document detailing our research priorities, from which a draft University Research Strategy had been produced. The draft had been distributed to Directors of Research, College Research Committees and a Research Forum of research leads in Schools- for comment. Feedback from these discussions had been distilled into the current version of the document. The document would now be distributed more widely for feedback, after which the final Research Strategy would be posted on the University webpages. The Vice-Principal also reported that the University had seen an increase in its research income, which reflected an increase in the number of quality applications, so any Research Strategy was built on a solid base. The next phase would be to convert this income into an enhanced research reputation.
- 18.2 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:
- A member commented that though he considered the document to be very good, he could not identify anything within it that was uniquely 'Aberdeen'. The member was of the opinion that the document had to take account of geographical location, acknowledging that Aberdeen is at the end of most transport routes and that Scotland was a country with significant bias towards its Capital. The member considered that the document should be more realistic and acknowledge that Aberdeen would be unlikely to be a first choice for visiting scholars, for example.
  - The Vice-Principal thanked the member for his comments, and added that the document would be put out to staff for further comment.

## **RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK – REPORT ON INSTITUTIONAL PREPARATIONS**

- 19.1 The Vice-Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange) updated Senate on the Research Excellence Framework, referring to the Report on Institutional Preparations (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal thanked colleagues for their work during the run-up to the REF submission. The initial runs of the staff selection exercise had been completed and these now needed to be finalized so that recommendations from Schools could be reviewed centrally. The Vice-Principal noted that decisions had to be communicated to staff soon about whether or not they were in the submission, so that staff had time to appeal any decision should they

wish to. The Vice-Principal reported that different disciplines had different approaches and there was always a balance to be had between quality of outputs and quantity of people submitted. The Vice-Principal reminded Senate that the University only gets SFC funding for 3\* and 4\* rated work. He stated that most disciplines would look at submitting staff with 2 x 3\* papers, though some disciplines had decided to recommend staff with 3 x 3\* papers. The University REF Steering Committee would consider these recommendations. A key challenge for the submission was the impact case studies. The University had sought the advice from an external agency and would be using their services for some case studies, together with the Communications Team, in order to perfect the case studies in time for June. Finally, the Vice-Principal said that it was important to emphasize to staff who would not be submitted that they nonetheless played an important part of the University's submission as almost everyone who is research active contributes by achieving grant income, supervising research students and sometimes contributing to papers named in the submission; all of which supported the research culture of the University.

19.2 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- A member commented on the proposal that only 4\* papers would be considered and asked whether or not this was a risky strategy as it precluded the possibility of any 3\* papers being upgraded. In response, the Vice-Principal agreed that it would be risky to do this and confirmed that it was proposed that 3\* papers would be submitted as well. He added that all papers were reviewed by a minimum of two members of staff and that a large proportion had also been reviewed by an external reviewer.
- Another member asked when the University might be able to test the database against the REF software. The Vice-Principal responded to say that there were two stages, first to upgrade the current version of PURE, second to test this against the REF software. He reported that the REF software had not been released yet but it was hoped that it would be in time for testing before Easter.
- Another member asked about AURA and whether or not this would be used for REF. The Vice-Principal responded by saying that only research that is in the public domain could be used for REF. AURA is the institutional repository for putting research outputs into the public domain. Although it has been confirmed by the REF Team that that AURA could be used for the purposes of REF, there are risks to this. For example, there could be implications for subsequent publication of papers that had already been 'published' in AURA, and issues of quality as such papers deposited in AURA had not undergone the normal quality assurance procedures of journals, such as peer review. At this stage, therefore, there was not a policy for, or against, using AURA for the REF.
- A member asked whether the June deadline for impact case studies was too early given that much of the evidence to support the case studies might not be available until after that date and available closer to the submission deadline later in the year. It was asked whether administrative assistance might be provided to search out and document the evidence in order to have it in place for June. The Vice-Principal stated that the University would be happy to look at that possibility. He added that the June deadline had been set in order that there would be time to review the case studies and evidence properly and to allow time to check that each statement was of high quality.

#### **SFC FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR 2013/14**

- 20.1 The Senior Vice-Principal updated the Senate on SFC Funding Allocation for 2013/14 (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). The University had received its letter from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) before Christmas regarding the teaching and research grants. The SFC had been asked to secure a 2% efficiency this year and as a result the teaching grant had increased by only 0.5%. A number of funded places had been lost again this year as a result of the Scottish Government's policy to introduce fees for RUK students. The Research Grant is a combination of the Research Excellence Grant based on performance in the last RAE and the Research Post Graduate Grant, which is related to numbers of PhD students. As a result of the drop in postgraduate numbers, the University had seen a reduction in this grant. The University would receive a further communication from the SFC in March regarding the Knowledge Transfer grant, amongst others.

### **UPDATE ON PERSONAL TUTORS**

- 21.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) updated Senate on Personal Tutors (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal reported that there had been very useful discussions with Edinburgh University. Edinburgh is one year into implementation of personal tutoring and it has been helpful to be able to learn from their experience. The Vice-Principal reported that all but one of the Senior Personal Tutors had now been appointed and that these staff would help shape the implementation, together with the Steering Group who would now be meeting more frequently. The Vice-Principal also reported that the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) was developing Personal Tutor role descriptors for students that would complement the Personal Tutor and Senior Personal Tutor role descriptors for staff.
- 21.2 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:
- A member questioned one aspect of the role descriptor for the Personal Tutor which was that they should provide a job reference, saying that they considered it to be inappropriate to be expected to provide a reference for a student with whose work one was not familiar. The Vice-Principal responded by saying that Personal Tutors would see a student through their entire degree programme and that over that 3 or 4 years they would therefore get to know a student. It was therefore highly appropriate that a Personal Tutor would provide a reference; he added that providing a job reference was also part of the Adviser role description.
  - Another member asked whether there were any plans to discuss the implementation of Personal Tutors with current Advisers so that the transition would be smooth and everyone aware of how it would work. The Vice-Principal responded to say that this was an excellent suggestion and that the Steering Group would ensure that this happened.

### **UCTL ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE**

- 22.1 The Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) presented the UCTL Annual Report to Senate (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes). The Vice-Principal started by saying that the few pages of the UCTL Annual Report encompassed a vast amount of excellent work that was being done across the University and he would highlight just a few points from the Report. The Annual Learning and Teaching Symposium had been well attended this year, with a large number of people attending who had not done so before. In relation to Graduate Attributes, the Vice-Principal reported that the challenge for the University was in how these are brought alive for students, and

how does the University measure whether the Graduate Attributes are being achieved by students who have gone through a Curriculum Reform (CRef) programme. The Vice-Principal reported that the University was about to redesign its process for dealing with complaints to bring it in line with new Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) requirements. The Vice-Principal was pleased to be able to report that the recent Feedback Survey indicated that 98% of students were receiving feedback on their work within the stated timeline, and that 86% of work was being submitted on time, and added that the data would be distributed shortly. Finally, the Vice-Principal reported that Peer Mentoring was being rolled out and he thanked the Schools of Medical Sciences and of Divinity, History and Philosophy for being involved in the pilot.

22.2 There then followed a discussion, the main points of which are summarised below:

- One member asked whether the University would continue to monitor feedback times on an ongoing basis and another questioned the need to do so, adding that it was considerably time-consuming and the 98% indicated that the University was doing well and that it should therefore be confident in its staff. The Principal responded to say that he was of the very strong view that the University should continue to monitor performance and that a priority would be to find an efficient and automated way to gather the data.
- The Vice-Principal added that the encouragement to students to keep feedback logs was also important, for whilst the quantitative data showed that 98% of feedback was received on time, there was currently no measure of the quality of that feedback.
- A member requested that information on student feedback logs be disseminated as they had not been aware of this initiative. Others confirmed that they, too, had not known about feedback logs. The Vice-Principal responded by saying that an email had been sent out to all students but it would be sent out again. He added that the sessions students had with their Personal Tutors would be one avenue for discussing the quality of the feedback the students were receiving.
- Another member reported that often students are not told when they should receive their marks and feedback. The Vice-Principal responded by stating that the University encouraged Schools to be completely clear about the turnaround time for marks and feedback, and that if this was not happening it would be followed up with the Heads of School.

## **REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

The Senate noted the actions taken by the University Court at its meetings on 11 December 2012.

### **1. Review of the Structure of the Academic Year**

23.1 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Court had approved the proposed new structure for the academic year and that the Institution would work towards its implementation for academic year 2014/15.

### **2. Resolutions Nos of 2012 [Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic)] and [Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic)]**

- 23.2 The Senate noted, for its part, that the Court had approved the two draft Resolutions and agreed to forward both to the General Council for comment and to make them generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

## **REPORT FROM THE UCTL**

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meetings on 23 January 2013, as under:

### **1. Amendments to Regulations**

- 24.1 On the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Senate approved the Amendments to Regulations and agreed to forward to the University Court, the draft Resolution, 'Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees'. The Senate also delegated authority to the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning to approve any amendments required subsequent to this meeting (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

### **2. Amendments to the *Policy on Undergraduate Student Progress***

- 24.2 On the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Senate approved the revisions to the *Policy on Undergraduate Student Progress* (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

### **3. Amendments to the *Policy on Appeals and Complaints***

- 24.3 On the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Senate approved the revisions to the *Policy on Appeals and Complaints* (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

### **4. Annual Programme Monitoring**

- 24.4 On the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Senate approved the processes for Annual Programme Monitoring (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

### **5. Anonymous Marking**

- 24.5 On the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Senate approved the proposal that the University adopts a policy that requires that, where appropriate, all assessments are marked anonymously.

### **6. Personal Tutors**

- 24.6 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning noted an update on the implementation of the personal tutor system. For its part, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved the role descriptors for Personal Tutors and Senior Personal Tutors.

## **7. Institutionally Verifiable Co-curricular Activities: The Aberdeen Internship**

- 24.7 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved a proposal to include the Aberdeen Internship on the enhanced graduate transcript as an accredited role.

## **8. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Model Complaint handling procedure**

- 24.8 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning noted that in December the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) published a model complaint handling procedure (CHP) for higher education. The model CHP is published as part of the SPSO Act (2002), and as such all universities are required to adopt the model CHP as soon as possible. The University will therefore be reviewing its procedures for handling complaints in the coming months to ensure compliance with the CHP by the required deadline of 30 August 2013.

## **SECOND CHAIR OF HISTORY – AMENDMENT OF TITLE**

- 25.1 On the recommendation of the College of Arts & Social Sciences, the Senate approved the amendment of title of the second chair in History (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

## **PROPOSED CHANGE TO THE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL COMMITTEE**

- 26.1 The Senate is asked to approve the proposed changes to the University Chapel Committee (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

## **DEVOLVED POWERS TO SENATE BUSINESS COMMITTEE FOR ONESOURCE STUDENT LIFECYCLE PROJECT**

- 27.1 The Senate devolved power to the Senate Business Committee to take any decisions which require to be made in regard to the implementation of the OneSource Student Lifecycle project in order to ensure that such decisions can be taken in a timely manner. A regular report on the Project's progress will be provided to the Senate.

## **ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**

- 28.1 The Senate noted progress made in regard to preparation for the ELIR in October/November 2014 (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR**

- 29.1 The Senate noted the establishment of a Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the new academic year. The Group held its first meeting on 4 February 2012 (copy filed with Principal copy of the minutes).

## **SENATE APPOINTMENTS**

- 30.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved the appointment of Professor Alison Lumsden as Chair of the John Reid Trust Award Scheme Board (*vice* Dr J Morrison).