

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2010

Present: Principal, Professors Logan, MacGregor, Morgan, Haites and Gane, Dr P Ziegler, Professors Crotty, Black, Imrie, O'Donoghue, Salmon, Cotter, Walkden, Wallace and Nelson, Dr J Geddes, Dr DC Hendry, Dr K Shennan, Professors Long and Burgess, Mr A Arthur, Dr J Lamb, Dr WD McCausland, Dr C Brittain, Dr T Weber, Dr P Mealar, Mrs F Payne, Mrs A Valyo, Professor Saunders, Dr A Campbell, Professor Duff, Dr A Arnason, Mr N Curtis, Dr CW Haerpfer, Dr AD King, Dr M Delibegovic, Dr L Hastie, Professor D Robinson, Dr I Greig, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr D Scott, Dr J Cleland, Professor Liversidge, Dr G Shirriffs, Dr G Walsh, Dr P Benson, Dr L Williams, Professors Chandler, Guz and Watson, Dr D Jolley, Dr N Spedding, Professor Anderson, Dr TJF Norman, Dr J Skakle, Professor G Robinson, Mr A Wilson and Mr Y Volvyne

Apologies: Professors Houlihan, Rodger, Ross, Secombes, McCaig, McGeorge, Greaves and Naphy, Dr B Connelly, Mrs L Johnson, Mr MJ Radford, Ms C Banks, Professor Hutchison, Dr JA Randall, Professor Schaper, Mr DC McMurtry, Dr J Ravet, Dr D Galbreath, Dr P Fraser, Dr J Sternberg, Dr M Young, Dr A Jack, Dr I Stansfield, Dr N Vargesson, Dr T MacFarlane, Professor Smith, Dr H Wallace, Dr R Bull, Dr T Thevar, Dr T Mighall, Professors Price and Grebogi

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

94. The minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2010 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

- 95.1 The Principal expressed his thanks to colleagues for the warm welcome he had received during his first three months in post. He informed the Senate that, during this time, he had spoken to a wide range of stakeholders and had been most impressed by their positive views of the University. These stakeholders had expressed their strong support and interest in future engagement with the University.
- 95.2 The Principal informed the Senate that Professor Houlihan had been awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours and invited the Senate to formally record its congratulations.
- 95.3 The Principal drew attention to the financial situation and informed the Senate that whilst the University, was in relatively good financial health, it faced serious financial challenges. He explained that in year cuts had been introduced in England and Wales. In Scotland, he explained that there would be no cuts imposed for the current year but that cuts were anticipated for the following year. The University would need to use the coming year to plan for a reduction in public funding in the future. He informed the Senate that the University would need to think creatively and seek to diversify its funding base.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2010-2015

- 96.1 The Principal thanked colleagues for the committed and constructive engagement there had been to date in regard to the Strategic Plan Consultation. He reminded the Senate that the consultation process was ongoing with a deadline of 17 June for responses from Schools and a deadline of 9 July for individual responses. Following the consultation period, there would be further dialogue with a view to the production of a draft Plan by the end of September.

96.2 He invited the Senate to contribute to the process of consultation and, in this regard, invited the Senate to comment on the consultation document (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The comments received are summarised below under the broad headings of the consultation document:

The Student Experience

- One member queried, in regard to widening access, how will we know when we have succeeded and what measures will we use to monitor our progress? In response it was noted that there are a range of benchmarks (including postcode and parental experience of HE) used by the SFC. It is clear that the University is not meeting these benchmarks. The University will need to decide whether or not it wishes to take this issue seriously.
- One member of the Senate stressed that there would be value in research fellows being encouraged to undertake more outreach work to schools, particularly those in more deprived areas.
- It was commented that putting a greater focus on widening access may have a negative impact on retention. In this regard, it was noted that the current regulations permit students to repeat and as such they can take a long time to complete their degree. It was suggested that while retaining students is important, consideration should be given to whether it is in the student's best interests to remain at University. In this regard, it was noted that the University was developing a partnership agreement (as part of the Curriculum Reform recommendations) to set out the relative responsibilities of students and the University. It was further noted that, as discussed at the last meeting of the Senate, the Convener of the UCTL, with others, was undertaking a review of the current and potential measures to address retention, and would report would be made to a future meeting.
- One member of Senate stressed the need to ensure that any developments proposed do not impact on staff workloads which were already heavy. In this regard, the work on undertaking business process reviews in central services was noted, It was suggested that there was a need to better understand the resource and cost requirements for the delivery of teaching to ensure that this is at an optimum.
- It was suggested with the changing societal needs that there might be value in exploring whether the Sixth Century Courses could be opened up as CPD provision or for community access.
- In regard to resources, it was noted that the University should also draw on its own expertise. In this regard, it was noted that the evidence-based teaching expertise from the MBChB might be a resource which could be of value to other Schools. Such sharing of good practice should be encouraged.

Research and Commercialisation

- One member of the Senate commented that in regard to the management of research, individual academic staff may consider themselves effectively to be self-employed in regard to their pursuit self-directed research interests. In comparison, in commercial research organisations, the direction of research is more closely managed. With money being tight, it was questioned whether this would have an impact on the freedom in regard to research. It would be important to protect blue skies thinking but there might be value in looking at the efficiency of research management. In response it was proposed that it should be possible to both support blue skies thinking whilst also focusing on more directed research and ensuring research excellence.

- In regard to the management of research, it was further commented that research should not be overly managed but rather research should be facilitated. Staff should be trusted to manage their own research and PhD students but institution-wide structures should be established to help support cross-School / College research. In response, it was stressed that research should be driven from the bottom-up. The central administration would work to remove barriers to support such inter-disciplinary research.
- It was further stressed by a member of the Senate that it was important to have the necessary equipment to support research. A central database of equipment held by the University would be helpful. It was agreed that this should be provided and it was further stressed that such co-operation might also be important across the Scottish sector.
- It was commented that in the humanities, research can be more of an individual activity and is often not funded. In this regard, it was noted that the Library is a valuable resource and needs appropriately supported.
- It was noted by one member of the Senate that while staff should take responsibility for ensuring funding for their own research, it would be good if greater facilitation could be provided by support services to assist with the submission of funding bids. In this regard, it was noted that assistance with impact statements would be especially helpful.

Internationalisation

- It was stressed that in regard to students studying abroad it was important to ensure that they have the necessary language skills. Likewise, efforts should be made to ensure that international students studying at Aberdeen have appropriate English language support.
- It was commented that it would be important to have an International Strategy and that this would be especially important in achieving the aim of becoming a Top 100 institution. Another member of the Senate suggested that an umbrella strategy was not essential and that it may stifle initiatives. Rather, he proposed that there was a need to ensure that activities were co-ordinated.
- It was commented that there was a need to ensure greater co-ordination in regard to recruitment activities. It was noted that the University population was changing and that there was a need to ensure that appropriate structures were in place to support this (e.g. staff development). In this regard, it was commented that the in-session English language training provided by the Language Centre needs to be centrally funded.
- One member of the Senate commented that the start date of 1 October for many Pg students means that they miss out on Fresher's week. It was suggested that there is a need to develop a structure which would allow them to engage in such activities.

Other

- In regard to school outreach activities, it was commented that in promotion applications there needs to be a place for such activities to be recognised. It was agreed that this should be addressed.
- It was queried in regard to the fenced-off grass area to the north side of the Edward Wright Building and the area of grass to the west of the MacRobert Building whether an alternative to grass could be used (such as heather) to avoid the need for maintenance. It was further commented that approaches to recycling could be

enhanced, for example provision of glass recycling facilities on campus. In this regard, it was noted that the Students' Association had just appointed two staff to support such initiatives through the Climate Challenge programme. It was further noted that the MacRobert area could be used as a meadow for children to use. It was agreed this should be pursued.

- It was commented that the University should ensure that it makes the best use of its resources and that from a public point of view that these are used to be best advantage (e.g. University Historic Collections).

96.3 In drawing the debate to a close, the Principal thanked members for their contributions and encouraged them to submit further comments by the 9 July.

UPDATE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

97. The Principal invited the Vice-Principal (Curriculum Reform) to update the Senate on progress in regard to the implementation of the Curriculum Reform recommendations (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In presenting the update, the Vice-Principal highlighted a number of key points from the paper as summarised below:

- A number of proposals for Sixth Century Courses for delivery in 2011/12 had been received but further submissions were encouraged.
- There continues to be interest from the press in regard to the Curriculum Reform developments. A feature would be included in the Independent Guide to Scottish Universities.
- A draft timetable had been produced and issued to Schools for comment by 16 July. The progress made to date was encouraging.

UPDATE ON ELIR

98.1 The Senior Vice-Principal expressed his thanks to Professor Long for his leadership of the University's very successful Enhancement-led Institutional Review. He drew colleagues attention to the letter from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) which detailed the initial outcomes of the review visit. He further expressed his thanks to those who had contributed to the production of the documentation submitted in advance of the Team's visit and to those staff and students who had met with the panel. He also thanked the Students' Association for their valuable contributions.

98.2 He invited Professor Long to update the Senate on the initial feedback received from the QAA. Professor Long drew attention to the overarching 'confidence' judgement which had been received in regard to the University's current and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. He advised the Senate that this was the highest of the three judgements which can be given. He informed the Senate that a number of areas of good practice had been highlighted. The positive outcome would form a solid basis for future teaching and learning developments going forward. The draft report was expected in early July with the final report due for publication in late September.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

The Senate approved the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 19 May 2010, as under:

1. Amendment to the *Code of Practice on Student Discipline*

- 99.1 The Committee approved amendments, as detailed below, to the discipline procedures relating to academic offences:
- Amendments to the timescale for students to be notified of the Investigating Officer's/Disciplinary Committee's decision (changing from 3 to 5 days)
 - Inclusion of separate protocols for initial interview/hearings and Disciplinary Committees to help make it clearer for students
 - Timescale for deferral of student attendance at initial interview/meeting and Disciplinary Committees be revised with a 6 week time limit be set
 - Amendments to ensure that the independent member of staff and note taker at the meeting are two separate individuals, with separate functions
 - Expansion of sections to make explicit the documentation to be provided by Schools in instances of cheating
 - Expansion of guidance on the documentation to be provided by Schools in instances of cheating
 - Tightening up the standard penalties for cheating
- 99.2 A further amendment to make provision for an Investigating Officer/Disciplinary Committee to require a second scrutiny of all other assessments submitted by the student in the current academic year was not approved and will be discussed further by the Committee in the future.

2. Term Dates

- 99.3 The Committee approved the Dates of Term for 2011-2012 and, provisionally, those for the sessions 2019-2020, as attached in Annex A.

3. Amendments to the Postgraduate Codes of Practice

- 99.4 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) the Committee approved amendments to:

Code of Practice for Postgraduate Taught Students
Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students

4. Amendments to regulations

- 99.5 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committees, the Committee approved amendments to regulations. These amendments were in addition to those already incorporated in the Omnibus Resolution (February 2010) and further ensure consistency across areas regarding Class Certificate validity.

5. Criteria for the award of research masters degrees with distinction

- 99.6 On the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) (ASC(Pg)), the Committee approved a change to Regulation 25 of Schedule A – General Regulations for Research Degrees, following the approval by ASC(Pg) of criteria for the award of research masters' degrees with distinction.

6. Revised guidance for consideration of reports from professional and statutory bodies (PSBs)

99.7 The Committee approved amendments to the guidance, previously included in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH), relating to the consideration of reports issued by Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSBs). The revised guidance will be included as sections 3.6.24 and 3.6.25 of the AQH.

7. UCTL Working Group on Student Course Evaluation Forms

99.8 The Committee approved amendments to the Student Course Evaluations Form on the recommendation of the Working Group on the Student Course Evaluation Form. The full report of the Working Group is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal

99.9 The five key recommendations of the Working Group, approved by the Committee are as follows:

- The SCEF process should be conducted online with fewer questions and more opportunity for free text comment.
- The SCEF process should take place during week 10 and be available for a minimum of 2 weeks.
- The SCEF process should be more widely publicised.
- Course co-ordinators forms should be modified.
- CLT and DIT be asked to investigate the possibility of providing the SCEF via WebCT.

99.10 It was agreed that the Convener of the Working Group along with the Convener of UCTL would meet with DIT in the first instance to take forward the implementation of the revised SCEF process based on the recommendations outlined in the proposal paper.

REPORT FROM ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE (POSTGRADUATE)

1. Agriculture: Agronomy

100.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the recommendation that the UHI Millennium Institute academic area in Agriculture: Agronomy be revalidated under the terms of the accreditation agreement currently in force between the University and UHI to deliver the research degree programmes of MSc, MPhil and PhD.

100.2 The revalidation would be effective immediately and remain in force until 30 September 2013 under the terms of the accreditation agreement between the University and UHI. The revalidation proposal was subject to the academic area meeting recommendations specified in the relevant report by a stipulated date. The report from the validation panel is available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/>.

2. Environmental Science

100.3 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the recommendation that the UHI Millennium Institute academic area in Environmental Science be revalidated under the terms of the accreditation agreement currently in force between the University and UHI to deliver the research degree programmes of MSc, MPhil and PhD.

100.4 The revalidation would be effective immediately and remain in force until 30 September 2014 under the terms of the accreditation agreement between the University and UHI. The revalidation proposal was subject to the academic area meeting recommendations specified in the relevant report by a stipulated date. The report from the validation panel is available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/internal/>.

TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

101. The Senate approved revisions to the Teaching and Learning Committee Structure (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

REPORTS FROM THE ASCS – COURSE AND PROGRAMME CHANGES

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

ELECTION OF NON *EX OFFICIO* MEMBERS TO THE SENATE

103. The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee, on behalf of the Senate, had approved the following timetable for election of non *ex-officio* members to the Senate to fill vacancies as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| (a) Friday 5 June 2010 | Nomination forms issued to all electors by the Secretary |
| (b) Wednesday 16 June 2010 | Latest date for return of nomination forms to the Secretary |
| (c) Friday 18 June 2010 | Voting papers issued to all electors by the Secretary |
| (d) Wednesday 30 June 2010 | Latest date for return of voting papers to the Secretary. |

The closing time for receipt of Nominations and Voting Papers to be 5.00 p.m.

Eligibility to propose candidates, stand and vote, in the election will be open to all academic and research staff of Grade 6 and above who are not members of Senate *ex-officio*.