

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

MINUTES OF THE ADDITIONAL MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Finn Abou El Magd, Rasha Abu Eid, Waheed Afzal, Ainhoa Burgos Aguilera, Sanaa Al-Azawi, Scott Allan, Joanne Anderson, Lesley Anderson, Sumeet Aphale, Euan Bain, Simon Bains, Martin Barker, William Barras, John Barrow, Harminder Battu, Nigel Beacham, Daniel Berg, Thomas Bodey, Jason Bohan, George Boyne, Alex Brasier, Fred Byrne, Isla Callander, Andre Justin Carpio, Alessandra Cecolin, Delma Childers, Sandie Cleland, Chris Collins, Matthew Collinson, David Cornwell, Rebecca Crozier, Andrew Dilley, Pete Edwards, Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, Muhammad Faraaz Dheen Mohamed, Nick Forsyth, Karin Friedrich, Greg Gordon, Kevhvan Graham, Ian Greener, Malcolm Harvey, Peter Henderson, Richard Hepworth, Jonathan Hicks, Niels Imrie, Gareth Jones, Dragan Jovcic, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Kate Kostick, Lesley Lancaster, Rhiannon Ledwell, Karl Leydecker, Beth Lord, Vasilis Louca, Colin Lumsden, , Laura McCann, Catriona Macdonald, Gary Macfarlane, David Mcgloin, Alasdair Mackenzie, Andrew Mckinnon, Michelle Macleod, David Mclernon, Alan Macpherson, Pietro Marini, Doug Martin, Sam Martin, Javier Martin-Torres, Samantha Miller, Martin Mills, Heather Morgan, Khalifa Muhammad, David Muirhead, Mintu Nath, Sam Newington, Nir Oren, Adeleja Israel Osofero, Graeme Paton, Ekaterina Pavlovskaja, Stuart Piertney, Bettina Platt, Amudha Poobalan, Tavis Potts, Ann Rajnicek, Brice Rea, Tom Rist, Justin Rochford, Joost Rommers, Miles Rothoerl, Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Joachim Schaper, Karen Scott, Charlaine Simpson, Diane Skåtun, John Skåtun, Anne-Michelle Slater, Valerie Speirs, Srinivas Sriramula, Mary Stephen, Lorna Stewart, Fiona Stoddard, Ruth Taylor, Dawn Thompson, Bert Timmermans, Steve Tucker, Neil Vargesson, Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Walklate, Ursula Witte, Ilia Xypolia

Apologies: Siladitya Bhattacharya, Irene Couzigou, Chantal den Daas, Toni Gibson, Beatriz Goulao, Mark Kurz, Alan Speight, Zeray Yihdego

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- 21.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members to the additional meeting of Senate which had been called to offer Senate the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing consultation on the future of Modern Language provision at the University. The Principal recorded formally his awareness of the current difficult and distressing time being faced by colleagues in Modern Languages and noted the importance of the current opportunity for Senate to contribute constructive and creative ideas towards the future academic viability and financial sustainability of that provision. The ideal outcome would be for Senate to be able to offer ideas about viability and sustainability. Before moving on to questions, the Principal asked the Secretary to outline the meeting formalities and indicated that this would be followed by an update on the consultation from the Senior Vice-Principal.
- 21.2 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, reminded members that the meeting would be recorded to enable the production of the minute. She noted that there were a large number of observers present and reminded everyone that only Senate members should take part in the discussion, using the chat facility only to indicate a wish to speak with a brief outline of the subject matter. Only members should indicate a wish to speak. All microphones should be kept muted unless speaking to avoid problems with feedback. As during any Senate meeting, she noted that motions could be moved from the floor and if a vote were required in response this would take place in Teams using the usual Forms format for

hybrid meetings. She reminded the meeting that only Senate members were eligible to vote and noted that a verification process would be undertaken after the meeting and as a result any vote count during the meeting would remain provisional until that process could be completed. She noted that every effort would be made to allow contributions from as many members as possible requesting patience from members wishing to speak if they had already spoken.

- 21.3 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal reminded members that they had been provided with the link to the consultation document ahead of the meeting. He noted that the previous day the first of a series of focus groups had been held with members of the School and that this had been a difficult meeting. He noted that, following the focus group, members of the Steering Group had met with the School Executive and had had a productive meeting. The intention was to hold a further meeting with School members and members of Modern Languages in the following days to begin a process of understanding the ideas that the School wished to put forward for the academic and financial sustainability of Modern Languages. He stated that a series of further engagements would be arranged throughout the period for gathering ideas and that this would run until 15 January. Final decisions would then be made, based on the entirety of the consultation, early in the new year bearing in mind the current UCAS cycle and the need to make decisions for students currently applying. Karl highlighted that several options had been laid out and the intention was to test the viability of each. Clearly the first option would maintain the maximum amount of provision, and this would be ideal if a way could be found to make this academically and financially sustainable. This was the conversation which needed to take place and any ideas which would aid with the identification of a viable way forward for Modern Languages. He noted that the Steering Group were looking forward to receiving the input from Senate as part of the consultation process.
- 21.4 The Principal suggested that Karl update Senate on amendments to some of the data that had been made in response to earlier feedback.
- 21.5 Karl clarified that, in response to Nadia Kirwan's circulation the previous day, data amendments would be made.
- 21.6 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science indicated that she had been seeking to raise a point of order for some time.
- 21.7 The Principal indicated that Karl should complete what he was saying and then he would ask Jen to make her point.
- 21.8 Karl continued, two important pieces of information had been highlighted, and clarified that he was confident that the staff numbers quoted in the consultation paper were correct in terms of the salary contributions within Modern Languages and that there was one small correction to be made to the PGR load which he understood should be slightly over 4 FTE rather than the 0.5 FTE detailed in the paper. He noted that this correction would have a minor impact on the overall financial position of the School as set out in the consultation.
- 21.9 Jen confirmed she wished to raise a point of order relating to recording and minutes, particularly verbatim minutes given the significant public interest in the outcome of the current meeting. She wished to ensure that the minutes represented an accurate record of proceedings and moved that Senate have the additional meeting of 6 December held under an amendment to Standing Order 28, with the minutes providing a verbatim account of the meeting.
- 21.10 The Secretary confirmed that the Senate minutes were already near verbatim when produced in the standard way. Recording of the meeting was undertaken as part of a reasonable adjustment in order to produce the level of accuracy required in the minutes.

She noted she did not anticipate the need to move further than the usual minute, but confirmed she was content to reflect on the nature of the minutes when that point was reached.

- 21.11 Jen confirmed this was acceptable and queried whether the recording would be available to Senate members.
- 21.12 Tracey confirmed that the recording was only available within her team as a reasonable adjustment to aid with the production of the minutes. She confirmed she would need to go through a further conversation in terms of the data protection requirements to amend that and so her intent was not to make the recording available. She further confirmed that the recording was held in order to respond to potential challenges.
- 21.13 Karin Friedrich, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History thanked Karl for laying out the context for the previous week's announcement of restructuring within Modern Languages noting that so far there had not been any discussion at Senate prior to the matter being discussed at Count on 12 December. She therefore wished to propose a motion and have it put to a vote.
- 21.14 Tracey confirmed that motions raised from the floor should be simple enough for Senate to understand verbally, making it clear within the motion what a decision was being sought on, and any argument going alongside. Therefore, a short form motion, answerable with a yes or no, and then supported with an argument was required.
- 21.15 Karin went on to detail:
- a. *in compliance with* the Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016, which defines the Senate as the body which is 'responsible for the overall planning, co-ordination, development and supervision of academic work of the institution';
 - b. *aware of* the respective responsibilities of Court, Senate and the Principal's Office as part of the good governance of higher education institutions as exempt charities;
- this Senate asserts its overall responsibility as a whole body for deciding on the adoption and cessation of degree programmes at the University of Aberdeen.*
- She noted she was detailing what is contained in law and further noted there were many who would second the motion.
- 21.16 Tracey confirmed it was appropriate for a member to progress a motion in this way. However, the motion, as she understood it, stated that Senate was responsible for approving degree programmes. She confirmed there was no debate on this and agreed this was what was stated in the legislation. She noted she did not feel it was necessary for Senate to pass a motion to confirm something which was already part of its responsibilities.
- 21.17 The Principal requested that Tracey confirm the position regarding programme approval.
- 21.18 Tracey confirmed Senate as the body responsible, noting it is done through delegation to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), but Senate could bring that back into Senate at any time if it were desired. Senate was the body responsible for approving degree programmes within the University.
- 21.19 At the Principal's request, Karin confirmed that this did cover the point she was making but noted that there were others she thought might wish to contribute.
- 21.20 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History indicated that his view was that the motion should be voted on as it was a precise clarification of something which needed to be clarified.

- 21.21 The Principal noted that he understood that Tracey had confirmed that the motion was entirely consistent with the powers of Senate and the position was clear.
- 21.22 Tracey confirmed that to be correct.
- 21.23 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science clarified that in terms of the 'grey book' the powers of Senatus Academicus 'to regulate and superintend the teaching and discipline of the University and to promote research' and 'to appoint two-thirds of any standing committee or committees charged by ordinance of the commissioners with the immediate superintendence of libraries, museums or contents thereof' etc in light of this, it is not that Senate simply has the power to approve degrees, it is that Senate has the capacity to regulate and superintend the teaching, discipline and research of the University. She asked for clarification on this point.
- 21.24 Tracey confirmed that, without the exact page of that section of the grey book open in front of her, Jen had quoted directly from the legislation. However, she noted that in relation to the elements referred to, the Academic Board or Senatus Academicus operates within the guidance and direction of the University Court as the Institution's governing body and so there is a framing in this regard but in the context of the elements read out, it was accurate in terms of the legislation.
- 21.25 Malcom Harvey, School of Social Science noted that regarding Tracey's comment, and with regard to Karin's motion, it is clear that this is a restatement of Senate's position in terms of its role and remit and it was his view that there was nothing wrong with moving to a vote to restate that. He noted that the point had been reached that Senate members believed it necessary to restate that position. The motion, which he would second from the floor and given the support for a vote he was unsure why there would be any objection to holding a vote.
- 21.26 The Principal confirmed he had no objections to holding a vote, but rather he was seeking to clarify the meaning of that vote. He noted that Senate had the right to vote on whatever it wished, and as there was a proposer and a seconder, he asked Tracey to confirm the process.
- 21.27 Tracey confirmed that a MS Form would be placed in the chat for response by Senate members. She highlighted it would be a yes agree the motion, no decline the motion choice. Numbers would be collated however, as stated earlier, the vote would require subsequent verification.
- 21.28 Karin restated the motion for voting:
As part of the good governance of higher education institutions, as exempt charities, this Senate asserts its overall responsibility as a whole body for deciding on the adoption and cessation of degree programmes at the University of Aberdeen.
- 21.29 Senate voted and the result was subsequently confirmed as:
87 in support of the motion
3 not in support of the motion
12 abstentions
- 21.30 Tracey confirmed the motion was carried.
- 21.31 The Principal asked if there were further points about process as he wished to deal with those, to enable the meeting to move on to matters of substance.

21.32 Malcom Harvey indicated he wished to raise a further motion from the floor. In line with the earlier request for motions to be stated concisely he went on to detail:

This Senate calls upon the University Court and bodies acting under its authority to pause all consultation processes regarding the cessation or reduction of University's programmes until (a) such University recovery plan is presented to Senate for appropriate scrutiny and (b) so far as it envisages any such cessation or material reduction of academic programme(s), approval of Senate.

21.33 The Principal asked Tracey to confirm what fell within Senate's remit and what belonged to other parts of the governance structure.

21.34 Tracey stated that the overall operation and financial sustainability of the University fell within the remit of Court and consequently so did the recovery plan. She noted, however, it was within Senate's powers to request or recommend to Court that was paused if that is what Senate wished to do. In terms of it being a call to pause, Tracey confirmed she had no problem with the proposed motion.

21.35 Many members indicated that they were prepared to second the motion as stated.

21.36 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History queried a statement made in the Open Session of October 26 when the Principal had stated that the University was not at the point of redundancies yet but only a month later staff members in Modern Languages were informed that they were part of the redundancy process. She asked how the current point had been reached in such a rush?

21.37 The Principal confirmed that redundancy consultations on the future of a discipline, or set of activities, is undertaken due to a statutory requirement to inform those affected that they may be at risk of redundancy. The Principal confirmed that the University was not at the point of redundancy but was consulting on how to improve the situation.

21.38 At the Principal's request, Debbie Dyker, Director of People, confirmed that staff had been informed they were at risk and the proposal was being consulted on. The University had a statutory obligation to commence that consultation with the campus trade unions, which had also been done, to allow them to input to the consultation on the proposals. There was no predetermined output from the process, but staff needed to be made aware of their rights in the circumstances.

21.39 Malcom confirmed he had no desire to speak further but indicated that Michelle MacLeod wished to speak.

21.40 Michelle MacLeod, Professor of Gaelic, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture noted that in the context of the current meeting she was possibly the only person at risk of redundancy. She stated that after 20 years of service to the institution this had come as quite a shock, as it had to her 28 colleagues who had also received letters late the previous Thursday. She expressed shock due to the decision to cut back all offerings in languages when the School had only been alerted formally to there being a problem with the budget on 23 October. She expressed further shock that the University would choose to pull back so completely from its civic responsibilities to offer breadth of degrees for the public benefit of the region and nation. She registered shock that the decision had been made with minimal consultation despite requests from colleagues to be involved in suggesting a way ahead for languages. She expressed her belief that a lack of communication had led to major misunderstandings around the work of staff involved with the language programmes who hold no budgetary, marketing or recruitment oversight and whose work is so intertwined with the work of the whole School. Senate members, along with other members of the university community, would have received the case from the

Senior Vice-Principal, on behalf of the Steering Group, for dismantling the languages programmes. Staff in languages had produced a comprehensive counter-report challenging information and processes of the Steering Group. She outlined briefly examples of the concerns on data, the Steering Group had heavily overstated the staff FTE and understated PGR numbers; the Steering Group had called for the immediate cessation of research because of performance however she noted that at the last REF languages were at a median level across the University, second for impact in arts and humanities and ranked fifth equal in the recent REF stocktake. The language staff's report noted the Steering Group's failure to demonstrate whether Risk and EDI assessments had taken place and the incompatibility with statutory requirements as well as local, national and international impacts. She indicated that there was not sufficient time in the meeting to give details of these points however she recommended the report to Senate members for further detail. In general, she indicated that there was a concern that the proposals ran counter to the University's charitable and civic missions as the University was alone as the only University outside of central Scotland offering language degrees which are recognised by Westminster, Holyrood and the British Academy as critical for the economy and society. She noted also that if the Steering Group's proposals were accepted the University would become the only Ancient University in the world not to offer language degrees. She also noted concern over the considerable, but unquantified, reputational risk to the University. Not only in the short term but also in the longer term with regard to alumni relations, international partnerships and recruitment more broadly. She highlighted to members that she had detailed many areas of concern, and there were many more that she had not listed. These were concerns not just for Gaelic, which the University was required to support under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, not just for Languages, but concerns for the whole Institution. She noted that her colleagues were not denying the University's financial crisis but were seeking to plan an active role in increasing revenue at the same time as committing to the societal need for the deep study of language, society and culture which aligned with the University's interdisciplinary, inclusive and sustainable commitments. The School staff had constructed a range of proposals which could contribute more fully to the University's financial situation. She asked, therefore, whether the Chair accepted that the Steering Group's recommendations were based on questionable data, a failure to take complete cognisance of charitable duty and civic responsibilities, failed to take cognisance of reputational damage; that important elements of procedural processes had been overlooked, and if so, did the Chair recognise that the proposals of the Steering Group needed to be reconsidered.

- 21.41 Responding, the Principal confirmed that the recommendations of the Steering Group were being consulted on which was exactly what should be happening. He expressed his pleasure that staff had produced a plan for financial sustainability and confirmed the plan would be considered fully. He noted that Michelle had made a number of points regarding process and legal points. He asked Karl to respond to the procedural points and Tracey to the legal points.
- 21.42 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that the process as set out, had been designed explicitly to permit staff to come forward with ideas. He noted that Michelle had referred to increasing revenue and agreed that it was important that this was done, and also that the costs needed to be examined. He confirmed that it was important that there was a process which allowed the University community to determine what could be taken forward. He noted that the report had made specific recommendations about the University's responsibilities towards Gaelic, including as part of the Gaelic Language Plan. He noted that this was one of the consultation questions and indicated that he would be happy to meet with Michelle and other colleagues for a serious dialogue concerning the future of Gaelic. He confirmed the University's commitment to continuing to teach languages and noted the process, as he had outlined at the beginning, placed importance on gathering views on the proposals put forward by the Steering Group but that it also

included another question seeking any other ideas about how languages could be made academically and financially sustainable.

- 21.43 The Principal noted that Karl had covered some of the legal aspects in his response, but suggested there may be other aspects Tracey would wish to cover.
- 21.44 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary highlighted in the context of the University's responsibilities around the Charitable Objects, that these responsibilities fell very much within the remit of the University Court and that Court were reminded of these responsibilities at the beginning of every meeting. She noted that this was an area where Court was responsible for ensuring that appropriate balances were maintained. As had already been noted, Tracey reiterated that the current consultation phase was such that there was a responsibility that all aspects were understood by Court before they were required to decide in line with the Charitable Objects.
- 21.45 Karl noted a further point. It was previously stated that an Equality Impact Assessment had not been undertaken however, as stated explicitly during the meeting with staff, this had been undertaken and had been considered by the Joint Consultative Committee on Redundancy Avoidance (JCCRA) at its most recent meeting. A commitment had been given at JCCRA that the EQIA would be further refined as the process progressed. Karl confirmed the Steering Group understood its commitments to equality impact very clearly and would carry out, and were doing so already, the commitments in this area.
- 21.46 The Principal expressed his sympathy for those finding themselves in the current situation, noting the set of circumstances was difficult and added that it was his hope that the process would generate ideas to move the University to a better place. The Principal added that he hoped Senate would contribute ideas during the meeting and noted that there was still sufficient time after the meeting for individuals, or groups of individuals, to come forward with other ideas for financial sustainability.
- 21.47 Martin Mills, School of Social Science, noted with reference to the first motion that any decision reached by the Steering Group with reference to the future of language degrees would require to be brought back to Senate for decision.
- 21.48 Responding, Tracey reconfirmed that the decision to withdraw or introduce degrees to the University Calendar would come back to Senate.
- 21.49 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science highlighted that the Vice President (Education) from the Students' Association and Brice Rea had both indicated in the chat that they wished to contribute.
- 21.50 Rhiannon Ledwell, Vice-President (Education) AUSA made a statement in support of the motion, outlining why she believed the consultation should be paused. She explained her view that the consultation was flawed in terms of the knowledge of the Steering Group of the Gaelic Language Plan and Gaelic programmes generally within the University. She also asserted that the Steering Group did not have a clear plan for student consultation given the timing of the launch of the consultation falling within the examination period. In addition, she noted that the request for student inclusion of the Steering Group had been refused. She further noted that there were confused messages from the Steering Group about the extent to which current students would be impacted by any changes being recommended. [Secretary's note – minute summarises the contribution given the concerns articulated at 21.51]
- 21.51 Responding to Rhiannon's statement, the Principal acknowledged the strength of feeling demonstrated but noted that some of the language used had been beyond the bounds of the normal discourse of Senate.

- 21.52 Scott Allen, School of Business acknowledged that everyone was aware of the University's financial position as had been set out and expressed the view that he expected that everyone shared a concern in this regard. He noted that it was difficult to take a view on the overall financial position when the consultation was taking an atomised approach and only looking at language provision. He noted that it was unlikely that purely taking action in languages would solve the financial position entirely and if this was unlikely, there was a need to see the overall recovery plan for the University as a whole, so that the complete picture might be understood. This was why he supported the motion to pause the consultation.
- 21.53 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences requested clarity on the data noting that there were conflicting sets of data coming from the Steering Group and Modern Languages staff. He noted that Karl had acknowledged the amendment in terms of PGR students and there had been a comment regarding the total staff salary budget but noted the total staff FTE required clarification. He further noted that other queries had been raised about overall student numbers from 2008 as provided in the consultation document. He noted his interpretation of the data showed changes that he was unable to trust due to the questions existing around the veracity of the data. He requested that moving forward the Steering Group and the School met and agreed a data set that everyone was able to believe in. He asserted that without trustworthy data it was not possible to take trustworthy decisions. He likened the situation to that when he had first joined Senate nearly eight years ago when decisions were being taken to cut activities without an overall plan. He highlighted that it had been discussed that a cut in Modern Languages would generate problems in terms of reputational damage etc and he asked what the vision was overall for the institution as simply making cuts might limit the future options available. He stressed the need to develop a model for the entire University and its future shape. He noted a shared support for the University and hence it was imperative that the vision developed was something that everyone could buy into.
- 21.54 The Principal asked Karl to comment on how the different data sets might be reconciled to provide comfort to Senate.
- 21.55 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal expressed his willingness to work with the School to reconcile the different viewpoints relating to the data. He noted, however, that the Steering Group had looked at more than the salary bill and that there were different ways of presenting the same data. The staffing data was not incorrect and student data had been taken consistently from the snapshot provided by Registry and Planning. He was content that the data were accurate but noted that any challenges would be considered, and corrections made to anything found to be inaccurate. He noted that in the absence of information to the contrary the data had to be assumed to be correct.
- 21.56 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences interjected noting that the evidence had been presented already and was available in documents accessible to all, that there was a conflict with the data being used by the Steering Group and reiterated his call for the Steering Group and the School to get together to agree an interpretation of the data which would take away the divisive arguments around data interpretation.
- 21.57 Karl confirmed that he had written to Nadia the previous day to indicate that the Steering Group were keen to correct any data errors and asked her to work with the Steering Group to do so. He agreed that the consultation was based on data and the decisions must be based on data and if the data were not accurate, they must be corrected.
- 21.58 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History raised a point of order noting the need to move to a vote on the motion.

- 21.59 The Principal sought to confirm whether there was anyone who had not already spoken who insisted on speaking, before confirming that Finn and Tom would speak before a vote was taken.
- 21.60 Finn Abou El Magd, School Convenor, Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture highlighted that the consultation period, currently 45 days, spanned the period including the Christmas break and assessment period and hence greatly reduced the working time available to all staff involved and the opportunity for staff and students to give feedback on existing proposals. He asked why the £1.64M deficit cited could not simply be absorbed by the rest of the University for the remainder of the current academic and financial year when a £1.7M deficit was already agreed in the budget for the School. In addition, he asked for a clear answer as to why the Steering Group believed 45 days was sufficient to make decisions on this. He noted that Karl had already related this to the UCAS cycle and requested clear reasoning beyond this.
- 21.61 Responding, Karl highlighted that the performance of the School was significantly worse at the current time than when the budget had been set due to an under recruitment of approximately £750,000 of fee income in the current financial year. With the significant fall in recruitment, it was anticipated that the situation would worsen further and therefore it was not a viable way forward to suggest the University could carry an already worse deficit that would likely worsen in future years without taking action as a matter of urgency.
- 21.62 Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture noted there were fundamental conflicts in the data being presented and noted he was unable to see how matters could proceed until there was clarity on all the matters of difference. He reminded Senate that in 2017 Senate had endorsed an evidence-based policy and therefore it was not possible for Senate to permit things to proceed until the evidence was clarified. In addition, he noted that in the context of collegiality, some years previously Senate had been presented with the decision to approve or not approve the enormously expensive new science building. He highlighted that this was clearly of no benefit to his School, but he had happily voted in favour of the development on the basis of collegiality and a shared mission for the University to educate. He asked Senate members to think of the future of his school with a similar, shared collegiality.
- 21.63 The Principal noted that Karl had already committed to resolving the differences in data interpretation. Echoing Tom's comments on collegiality, he noted the community was together in the current situation. He highlighted that one sure way to make the situation worse for all would be to do nothing. He highlighted that the purpose of the meeting had been to generate constructive, creative and collegiate ideas around how the student numbers could be improved, and the financial sustainability of language provision could be ensured. He assured Senate that, regardless of the decision today, that work would continue.
- 21.64 Joanne Anderson, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History noted that the current discussion was an appeal to Senate's authority and to due process, citing the example of Philosophy in 2008/9 and Art History in 2017/18 when both areas had been subject to significant restructuring and good ideas and positivity had been generated through external review rather than rushing through a consultation when individuals are not necessarily available in the best state to make the best decisions. She suggested that to slow down would result in good rewards. She suggested that restructuring may result in increased REF income and improved student recruitment as evidenced by Art History. She advocated that the Institution should learn from past cases preserving what is unique and special about the institution as well as supporting colleagues.

21.65 The Principal agreed that there were several examples from the last five years where new steps had been taken to grow student numbers and these had been successful. He confirmed that this was exactly what was being sought at the current time.

21.66 Before moving to a vote, Tracey confirmed the motion:

This Senate calls upon the University Court and bodies acting under its authority to pause all consultation processes regarding the cessation or reduction of University's programmes until (a) such University recovery plan is presented to Senate for appropriate scrutiny and (b) so far as it envisages any such cessation or material reduction of academic programme(s), approval of Senate.

21.33 Senate voted and the result was subsequently confirmed as:

78 in support of the motion
15 not in support of the motion
5 abstentions

21.34 Tracey confirmed the motion was carried.

21.35 The Principal confirmed his expectation that colleagues in Modern Languages would continue to welcome ideas for revenue generation and increasing student recruitment and members should continue to send them on.

Clerk's note: The time allocated to the meeting expired at this point but after a brief hiatus it was agreed that the meeting would continue with the Senior Vice-Principal in the chair.

22.1 Alasdair McKenzie, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition spoke in support of language provision generally but specifically Gaelic provision within the University. He noted that Gaelic was a protected language under the United Nations Declaration and The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. It was his view that the opportunities for Gaelic should be explored. It had not already been raised but around 1.8 million people were currently learning Scottish Gaelic on Duolingo which presented a huge market potential which the University should be exploiting to increase numbers in Modern Languages. He noted that enthusiasm for Gaelic had increased over the previous 10-20 years, particularly amongst the under 30 age group. He also noted the need for exploring provision for Gaelic teachers to increase the use of the language around Scotland which was the main aim of the Scottish Gaelic Act. He expressed the view that the University was missing an opportunity and should be marketing itself to provide opportunities for Gaelic teaching.

22.2 Miles Rothoerl, Vice-Chair (Education), Students' Association noted that the current position had the future of the department being decided on the basis of a 45-day consultation period taking place over Christmas and New Year, and exam week, when certain students were away or busy, and which had put forward three predefined outcomes. He highlighted his view that the consultation did not permit sufficient time or scope and been set up as a legal formality. He highlighted that the Students' Association stood firmly behind the staff in Languages who had made clear again and again that they were not warned that the department was at the end of the road and whose jobs were placed at risk just before Christmas and who were not given the opportunity to work through alternatives. The Senior Vice-Principal had made the point today that the financial position of the School was worse than had been budgeted for. He stressed that the students were not asking to continue with the current structure and acknowledged that demographics had changed since Brexit. He further acknowledged that there was a need to address the deficit, noting the University was not on the brink of bankruptcy and asked why the deficit could not be absorbed for another year to enable the University to stop, take

a step back and to do things properly. He asserted that to rush things at this stage would be far more damaging for students and staff whose futures risked being thrown in disarray more than any short-term deficit could do and there wouldn't be any way for the situation to be reversed. He expressed the hope that Court would remain cognisant of this fact when it met on Tuesday.

- 22.3 Fred Byrne, School Convenor for Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History, Students' Association noted that as a second-year student he found the Senior Management of the University opaque, lacking transparency and uncommunicative. He had attended the Annual General Meeting of the Students' Association where Professor Leydecker had been unable to attend in person and had appeared on screen instead. He noted that the minute the current meeting of Senate had finished senior management had been rushing to leave to avoid accountability. He highlighted his view that the consultation had been announced at a time when students were unable to come together effectively at a time when assignments and exams were taking place and stress levels were already high. He suggested it was similar for staff. He asked what assurances could be given to ensure accountability and communication and if his impression was wrong and management were open to communicating with students, he invited the Senior Vice-principal to attend a 'Stop the Consultation: Save University Languages' information and planning session being hosted by AUSA and The Gaudie at 3pm on Friday 8 December in The Union Brew?
- 22.4 Karl noted he would take as many points as possible before responding where appropriate.
- 22.5 Martin Mills, School of Social Science, speaking as a recent ex-trustee of the University noted that the institution was a charity and charities were often engaged in activities which did not make money directly rather were designed for the public benefit. Lots of sections within the University and lots of activities were undertaken for the public benefit and did not generate immediate income as a university, unlike a shop, was involved in building the future. The goal was to identify what was to the public benefit. He noted that the primary question to be asked was the public benefit question or, he suggested, the University would be in danger of breaching its charity test. He noted that the University was in danger of taking a simple for-profit approach, particularly if a solely student recruitment perspective was adopted. He suggested that Medicine undertook a lot of work which spanned significant time periods before generating any profit. Such medical developments were undertaken as part of a strategic view of the public benefit as part of seeking to grow multiple income sources. He noted concern with an approach which seemed to be indicating that student numbers were the only important aspect. He suggested that where an external body saw a public benefit this had to be considered and there were clearly a lot of them particularly with Modern Languages as a whole, and also applied to all aspects of the university as a whole as a public benefit charity.
- 22.6 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History added to Martin's point regarding keeping Modern Languages in line with the 2040 Strategy plan for inclusion and decolonising the curriculum. She noted that without languages the University would be unable to reach these targets and the goals. She suggested that it was imperative that languages were kept as the vehicle for other identities to express themselves. She added that when it was said that everyone was together in the situation the majority of the population was coming from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Speaking as an Italian, she noted that she felt threatened by the dismantling of Modern Languages as it was part of expressing inclusion and multicultural values within the institution. Being all together in the situation meant respecting and keeping different identities that are all able to be expressed through languages.
- 22.7 Finn Abou El Magd, School Convenor, Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture referred to his previous point (minute 21.6) about why the University was unable to absorb the deficit. He asked whether there was an expectation that a more normal period of

consultation of, for example, five months, would worsen the financial situation significantly. He also asked for an explanation of why the consultation period could not be extended to allow time for creative, effective discussion and the development of reasonable and proportionate proposals.

- 22.8 Responding, in clarification of his earlier point, Karl reiterated a point he had made previously to staff in languages. An extended consultation period would result in a final decision not being reached prior to decisions needing to be made around admission of students to degree programmes in languages. This might, in turn, lead to it being more difficult to make sufficient recruitment for September 2024, extending the period of uncertainty which, regardless of the outcome, was clearly widespread outside the institution already. Extending the period of uncertainty would not provide reassurances to those with concerns about the decisions which would be taken eventually given discussions in the media. He suggested that delaying would create an undesired situation of not being able to recruit students. This risk was why there was a feeling that decisions should be taken as soon as possible to end the uncertainty.
- 22.9 Jo Hicks, School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture noted a significant part of the uncertainty had been caused by the timing of actions by the Steering Group which could have come earlier but he took heart from the meeting which was taking place. He noted well run universities relied on well informed Courts and Senates and that was what was being worked towards. He asked for clarification around how Senate's request to Court to pause the consultation would be communicated to Court and how Court would be informed of Senate's concerns around the data underpinning the decision-making process.
- 22.10 In response Tracey Slaven, University Secretary noted her dual role as Secretary to both Senate and Court and confirmed she would make sure the information was conveyed to them and included in the papers for the meeting of Court on 12 December.
- 22.11 Iliia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked if would be possible for Court to be provided with the recording of the Senate meeting. She also noted that many of her constituents had asked about possible impacts on the work to decolonise the curriculum and how that might be impacted by the consultation. As one of the Schools leading the Decolonisation project, she noted the work being undertaken by colleagues in Modern Languages and expressed concern about the potential impact on the project coming from the restructuring. She noted that this was a potential conflict not just with Decolonising the Curriculum but also with Aberdeen 2040 and the commitments to inclusion, internationalisation and interdisciplinarity.
- 22.12 Responding, Karl noted that the commitments of Aberdeen 2040 were clear in terms of internationalisation, and he was unclear of the point being made about how changes in Languages impacted on those commitments. He indicated he would be happy to discuss further details of these concerns by email to help understand how the proposals in Languages impact on the University wide project of decolonisation.
- 22.13 Fred Byrne, School Convenor for Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History (DHPA), Students' Association reiterated that a strong language department with a strong staff was not just important to students studying language degrees but to students all across the University and beyond in the wider community in Scotland. He reported he had reached out to students in DHPA as their School Convenor and he wished to convey many positive experiences students have had studying with the department. One student who had been studying French and Philosophy had said that studying French and Philosophy together had provided a deeper understanding of both subjects and had found that French Culture classes had relevance across all philosophy classes by providing historical and cultural context to philosophical arguments and texts. They had studied Rousseau's Political

Thought which they felt they had had a deeper more nuanced understanding of because of a French culture course they had taken simultaneously which had covered the French Revolution, whose leaders had been inspired in a large part by Rousseau's work. To get rid of the opportunity to study joint honours degrees such as this, which not only taught students to speak the language but also permit understanding of the cultural and historical context of the countries where the language was spoken would rob students of the nuanced education that had been provided to them over the last year and a half. A student studying history and politics with an elective in Spanish had said that they had made friends from across the University from lots of different disciplines but noted that most of their uni friends came from Spanish. The department had such knowledgeable and dedicated staff, who were so passionate about their respective country's languages and cultures, it would be a true travesty if such a wonderfully diverse department, that contributes to staff and student life in such a significant way, were obliterated. A Student of German and History had reported that they were able to utilise German sources which had provided them with information which would not have been available to them from English sources which had been a big boost in terms of permitting them to explore wider collections with confidence. A second year History and Theology student studying an elective in Arabic said that she had been helped immensely in her understanding of a region in which she wished to pursue historical research. If they had a chance to have a degree with Arabic, they would take it, even though that was not an option currently. The wider point being made was that there was appetite from students not currently able to pursue joint degrees, to take joint degrees. He suggested that if the opportunities were available and advertised correctly there would be a lot of students willing and excited to do joint degrees in languages. He noted that from the last few days campaigning they had seen the important part played by the Language department in DHPAH and DHPAH students, as well as the wider community, would be affected adversely by its loss and this was why they were seeking to stop the consultation.

- 22.14 Karl reminded Senate that option one put forward in the consultation document proposed the retention of all joint honours degrees with the only degrees being removed being the single honours routes which had very few students. He noted that he had heard loud and clear the value of those joint honours degrees and noted his hope that a viable and financially sustainable way to keep those degrees would be found which was the purpose of the consultation and he looked forward to engaging with AUSA and other colleagues as things progressed. He noted he was unavailable to attend the meeting at 3pm on Friday due to other University business relating to the University Court.
- 22.15 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary confirmed that the original end point of the Senate meeting had been scheduled for 4pm and that the Principal had requested that the meeting continue until 4.30pm with Karl in the chair. Tracey noted that there were a couple of people waiting to speak who had not already spoken.
- 22.16 Karl indicated that he would hear from them before turning to others waiting to speak in the time remaining.
- 22.17 Thomas Bodey, School of Biological Sciences noted the reputational damage that had already been done and asked, regardless of how the situation was resolved, what the plan was to confirm that the University was international and inclusive, and asked who would be responsible for addressing this?
- 22.18 Karl confirmed that Thomas's point would be reflected on by the Senior Team.
- 22.19 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition asked that it be recorded that it was disappointing that only an hour had been scheduled for the meeting.

The matter had fundamental implications for members of the University, and for the breadth of education at the University, and as such only an hour was very disappointing. She appreciated the meeting had been extended but it was disappointing the Convenor had been unable to stay in the Chair and she asked that when the matter returned to Senate, as members had been reassured it would, the meeting would be allocated a substantial amount of time as well as being in-person.

- 22.20 Michelle MacLeod, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, asked whether there was any guarantee that between the current meeting and that of Court, offers would be made to students applying to study languages. She noted, in terms of reputation, her view that there was an opportunity to capture a significant position within languages in the UK. She suggested that the University was in the unfortunate position of being seen as the only institution struggling with languages however it was known that it was a nationwide issue and that there was nationwide demand for languages, and it was also known that government, the British Academy and diplomats place great emphasis on language skills. The University could demonstrate it was a listening university and the University had listened to national debate and outcry and the University should reposition itself as being at the forefront as language champions.
- 22.21 Tracey confirmed that, although debate could continue, the allocated time had concluded and that the meeting should close. This would not be an adjournment and so did not require the consent of Senate. Tracey reiterated the points made by both Karl and the Principal that ideas which could contribute to the sustainability of languages provision were very much needed at the time.
- 22.22 In closing the meeting Karl, as Chair of the Steering Group, reiterated how useful it had been to hear the views of Senate and anyone who wished to write to the Steering Group was encouraged to do and confirmed the Steering Group would be engaging extensively with staff in Modern Languages and across the School in the coming weeks. He noted that everyone was seeking the best for the University, and he understood the force of the arguments and the issues that had been raised and the difficulties being caused for staff and students in languages. He confirmed he understood the difficulties and his responsibilities in this regard to reach the best possible outcome for languages and the sustainability of the University's provision.