

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Finn Abou El Magd, Rasha Abu Eid, Ainhoa Burgos Aguilera, Waheed Afzal, Sanaa Al-Azawi, Scott Allan, Sumeet Aphale, Joanne Anderson, Euan Bain, Simon Bains, Martin Barker, William Barras, John Barrow, Nigel Beacham, Daniel Berg, Siladitya Bhattacharya, Jason Bohan, George Boyne, Alex Brasier, Fred Byrne, Isla Callander, Andre Justin Carpio, Alessandra Cecolin, Aarushi Chakraborty, Delma Childers, Chris Collins, Matthew Collinson, David Cornwell, Rebecca Crozier, Andrew Dilley, Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, Karin Friedrich, Nick Forsyth, Kevhvan Graham, Niels Imrie, Toni Gibson, Ian Greener, Aravinda Meera Guntupall, Malcolm Harvey, Richard Hepworth, Constanze Hesse, Jonathan Hicks, Gareth Jones, Dragan Jovcic, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Kate Kostick, Rhiannon Ledwell, Karl Leydecker, Vasilis Louca, Beth Lord, Laura McCann, David Mcgloin, Gary Macfarlane, Michelle Macleod, Emily Mckay, David McLernon, Andrew Mckinnon, Alan Macpherson, Pietro Marini, Doug Martin, Sam Martin, Samantha Miller, Khalifa Muhammad, David Muirhead, Mintu Nath, Sam Newington, Adeleja Israel Osofero, Nir Oren, Amudha Poobalan, Graeme Paton, Ekaterina Pavlovskaja, Stuart Piertney, Bettina Platt, Ann Rajnicek, Tom Rist, Justin Rochford, Joost Rommers, Miles Rothoerl, Joachim Schaper, Karen Scott, Ankita Sinha, Diane Skåtun, Anne-Michelle Slater, Alan Speight, Valerie Speirs, Srinivas Sriramula, Mary Stephen, Lorna Stewart, Fiona Stoddard, Ruth Taylor, Bert Timmermans, Steve Tucker, Neil Vargesson, Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Walklate, Ursula Witte, Ilia Xypolia, Sacad Yussuf

Apologies: Harminder Battu, Sandie Cleland, Pete Edwards, Beatriz Goulao, Peter Henderson, Lesley Lancaster, Martin Mills, Heather Morgan, Brice Rea, Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Dawn Thompson

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- 8.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming newly elected staff and students to their first meeting of Senate. The Secretary reminded members of procedures: there were no planned fire alarms; the meeting would be recorded; members were asked to state their name before contributing to discussion and advised to use the chat function to state when they wished to ask a question. Members were reminded that the chat itself does not form part of the formal minute, and to remain muted when not speaking. Members were reminded that, while all staff and students are welcome to attend Senate, only members are permitted to contribute to debate. They were also reminded that, as laid out in the Standing Orders, any motions for discussion must be related to items already on the agenda for discussion. Any voting would take place using the auditorium functionality for those in the room and Forms within the chat for those on Teams.
- 8.2 After some discussion and confirmation that the late addition to the agenda, the paper on graduation location, was a substantive item for discussion that would be afforded sufficient time for a full discussion, Senate agreed that the paper should be discussed after the Court Report. With this amendment, Senate approved the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF 20 SEPTEMBER

- 9.1 Senate approved the minutes from the meetings held on 20 September 2023.

ORAL REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL AND UPDATE ON HE SECTOR/UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS

- 10.1 In addition to his written report, the Principal updated Senate on the current financial difficulties being faced by the sector and the University. He highlighted that a shortfall in international postgraduate taught (PGT) students was being seen across the sector. Early indications from the Scottish Funding Council indicated that the projected figures for the sector were likely to be, on average, 18% fewer international PGT students in Scotland than there were last year. The Principal noted that the shortfall in students was anticipated to leave the University with a 5% shortfall in revenue for the current year. He acknowledged that action must be taken to address the shortfall and noted that this could not all be achieved within the current year; a phased approach needed to be taken. He noted that there would be a meeting of Court in the next few weeks to look at a phased financial recovery plan and, although he was unable to fully anticipate the plan Court would approve, he stressed the best way of approaching the shortfall would be to generate more revenue. He noted his thanks to the schools he had already met with for their constructive contributions to addressing the shortfall, and noted the importance of addressing the shortfall in a way that protects and promotes the quality of the University's education and research.
- 10.2 On behalf of a constituent, Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History asked a question:
- 'The last five years have seen a significant increase in the cost of leadership at the Institution. We now have 14 Dean positions as 0.5 FTE appointments at a senior level these bring a collective cost to the institution of around £500,000 per year. As a relatively small institution, how can we justify such an inflation of the leadership team? In addition, many were surprised to see the recent advertisement for a Vice-Principal (Education) at the University with a stated salary of £150,000. According to the response to a recent Freedom of Information request, the salary costs of the ten members of the University Senior Membership Team (SMT), not including the Principal, have risen from around £1.09million in 2018 to around £1.42million in 2023. How can this rise in the salaries of a small team and the average individual salary of £142,500, which is around 2.2 times a typical professorial salary, be justified at a time when schools are being asked to take on austerity measures which will bring about an increase in workload and will likely have a negative impact on the student experience. These increased costs seem to be a matter for discussion at Senate.'
- 10.3 The Principal noted that it was a long and involved question and he didn't think he would be able to respond to every single point during the meeting, but he noted he would get clarification of the details circulated to members. The Principal noted that when he arrived in 2018 his recollection was that there were seven or eight Vice-Principals. Since 2018 there have been four. The number of Vice-Principals was cut in half at that point and has not subsequently risen. He recalled that, at that time, there were 16 Deans whereas there were only 14 or 15 now. He committed to get the figures he recalled checked, clarified and circulated to the Senate. However, he would need to clarify and circulate the comparative costs. The Principal noted the questions were entirely fair in the circumstances and that the answers would be open and transparent.

Clerks Note: Following the meeting it was confirmed by Human Resources that the headcount for the number of Deans had not increased over the last 5 years, indeed the number had decreased by 2. As the Deans were all internal appointments, there was no subsequent uplift to the budget position as a consequence of these appointments except for an honorarium payment of £5k.

The composition of the SMT had undoubtedly changed as the external environment had shifted and the priorities of the University refocused to support the delivery of Aberdeen 2040. The Vice Principal portfolios had been revised to reflect these priorities. There were currently 4 Vice Principals which is a reduced number compared to 5 years ago. In terms of the senior management team salaries, these were benchmarked in the Sector and are governed by the Remuneration Committee. Prior to any appointment the Remuneration Committee was required to approve the salary parameters for the appointment. The Remuneration Committee received the appropriate benchmark data and market information to inform their decision making.

- 10.4 Joanne Anderson, School of Divinity. History, Philosophy & Art History (DHPAH), noted that the Principal had referred to revenue generation being the preferred approach to the current situation. She asked if the Principal would comment also on the potential contribution that fundraising activities could make? This was a question a member of DHPAH was keen to have raised at Senate.
- 10.5 Responding, the Principal noted that the University was extremely fortunate to have very generous donors amongst the alumni community, as well as others in the North-East of Scotland, who consistently donate money to the University. He noted that in the previous year this had contributed approximately £3million. He reported that it was his hope that this could be stepped up in the short term with a new fundraising campaign being launched in the following eighteen months. He added that anyone with connections to donors, needing help or support to encourage them to be generous towards the University, should get in touch with the fundraising team. He noted that fundraising was very much part of the planned approach alongside the expansion of Online, Transnational Education and Commercialisation activities which, when taken together, would help to move the institution to a better place.
- 10.6 A member of the Students' Association noted an awareness of the extent to which the University is reliant on international student fees, and the fact that the UK Government is creating a hostile environment for international students, and queried the actions being taken to counter the hostile environment and improve the experience of international students?
- 10.7 The Principal noted that the University works constantly with Universities UK, and separately, to lobby the UK Government to take a different position. He commented that the Scottish Government is more sympathetic to international students, and they too are lobbying the UK Government to take a different position on international students. He noted that there was a lot of work on going trying to bring about change in this position but highlighted that there was a need to be realistic about how long this might take. He expected that real change was unlikely to be seen until after the next UK General Election. He encouraged students to use their influence by talking to their MPs, MSPs and anyone else they felt had influence in the matter. The University would also continue to do likewise. He noted that initial unconfirmed figures for Scotland indicated a likely £300million loss to the Scottish economy associated with the decline in international student numbers.
- 10.8 Rhiannan Ledwell, Vice President (Education) in the Students' Association asked whether there had been a change in marketing support for areas adversely impacted by drops in student numbers due to Brexit or similar factors? She noted the marketing campaigns she was aware of tended to be for the high money-making areas and not for the other smaller programmes.
- 10.9 Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Global Engagement) responded to confirm that target markets were being more widely diversified to reduce reliance on the traditional volume markets of China, West Africa and South Asia so, for example, South-East Asia was now being targeted alongside other countries for international students. This, together with reinvigorated direct and indirect digital campaigns, seeking to reach students via platforms they are familiar with, to promote online courses as well as campus-based

delivery, was a key component of diversification. Diversification, in all its forms, was seen as key.

- 10.10 Aravinda Guntupalli, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition noted that the Principal's update had made it clear that international student numbers were not expected to increase anytime soon so she had started to compare the University's fees with those charged by other Universities. She noted that, in comparison with the fees charged by Russell Group institutions and other institutions, they may have more international students because they are cheaper. She noted that our UK fees are similar to these institutions where there are similar numbers on programmes such as Public Health and Management but when looking at international fees there is a considerable gap. Compared with institutions such as Nottingham and Southampton our international fees are expensive. She suggested that an in-depth examination of fees compared to others in target markets, would be beneficial.
- 10.11 The Principal confirmed that this was already underway. He noted that, in addition to looking at the headline fees, work was being undertaken to look at net fees taking account of available scholarships and discounts to ensure competitive pricing is achieved without losing money.
- 10.12 André Justin Carpio, School of Medicine Convener, Students' Association, noted that the statistics for the MBChB showed there were only 19 places available for international students for which 449 applications were received. He asked if it was possible to increase the number of places available for international students?
- 10.13 Siladitya Bhattacharya, Head of School, Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition confirmed that this was not possible as student numbers were heavily regulated.
- 10.14 Will Barras, School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture raised a query about communication strategy. He noted that on 26 October the Press & Journal (P&J) had run a news story with the headline 'Staff invited to step forward for redundancy as Aberdeen University looks to plug £15 million funding hole'. He further noted that The Gaudie had run a similar story online with the story likely to be front page news on the forthcoming print edition. He noted that at the previous week's meeting with elected members of Senate, the Principal had indicated that he had reacted with dismay as the P&J article as it did not reflect the situation. Will highlighted that the Principal had noted that in some institutions communications teams engage very actively with the media and misleading headlines could be retracted or corrections issued but Will noted that the headline was still on the P&J website a week later. He asked whether the University had made any attempt to put a different narrative into wider media coverage in recent days?
- 10.15 Tracey Slaven. University Secretary confirmed that the University was engaging actively with both the local and student press to ensure corrections are issued where appropriate. She noted that there were real challenges in this instance as the content of the specific article was not inaccurate, however, the challenge came from the headline attached to the article by a sub-editor. This had led to there being relatively little to be done in terms of this coverage. She agreed the headline was not helpful and not accurate.
- 10.16 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History raised a question from a constituent regarding the number of dean positions which had risen in recent years and was more than double when compared to the previous College positions. This was particularly noticeable if the University was compared with, for example, the University of Dundee who have five deans compared with our 14. The dean positions taking senior academics from schools costs the institution around £500,000. She asked whether this inflation of the leadership team was necessary and whether the new structure was efficient and effective and how were efficiency and effectiveness measured?
- 10.17 The Principal reiterated his previous response that there had not been an increase in the number of deans in the last five years.

- 10.18 Iliia Xypolia, School of Social Science, noted that she had a question which related to that raised by Joachim earlier (minute 10.2) in terms of the new Vice-Principal (Education). She noted that the miscommunication to members of Senate about the role they could play in the selection process, noting the late invitation to the presentations for the previous week, had led to only a handful of elected members being present and hence the feedback would not have been representative of Senate as a whole. She further noted that this was a missed opportunity as the Vice Principal (Education) probably works most closely with Senate. The design of the exercise had resulted in the feedback only being available to the appointment panel after the interviews had taken place. She also queried whether, in the context of the hiring freeze, reducing the salary of the Vice Principal to around £100K would provide the opportunity to save one academic post?
- 10.19 Responding to the point about salaries advertised through recruitment generally, the Principal noted this was valid, however, when seeking to appoint individuals already in senior positions elsewhere it would not be a sensible option to offer a lower salary than that which they already received as they would be unlikely to come and would probably be insulted. This was a competitive process with other universities. He confirmed that the feedback from Senate had been taken account of in the selection decision.
- 10.20 Responding to the point about communication Tracey confirmed she was happy to pick up on things outside the meeting, but her understanding was that the normal processes had been followed for inviting members of Senate to presentations and senior staff invited to focus groups. She confirmed that the feedback from both groups had been provided to the Panel immediately after the interviews so that the feedback was part of the holistic process of decision making. Tracey reminded Senate that the Remuneration Committee, a sub-committee of Court, with delegated authority from Court to oversee the processes of senior appointments and the process required that it is not just the University's position which is taken into account, but there must be benchmarking with explicit consultation required if any variation from the benchmark is proposed.
- 10.21 Jo Hicks, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture asked whether, in the context of academic restructuring, the Principal would guarantee that there would be full consultation with all relevant sections of schools before Court made any decisions regarding academic restructuring?
- 10.22 The Principal confirmed that there would be consultation.
- 10.23 Alan MacPherson, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture commented in the context of teaching around language and society, which has been highlighted as a particular area of concern in recent meetings, noting that there would be an associated impact on research environment both in the humanities and the University as a whole. As matters impacting on teaching and research, he asked whether any proposals would come before Senate before any decisions are made about strategic realignment for cost saving?
- 10.24 In response, Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that ultimately this is a decision for Court, but he anticipated that an academic view from Senate would be sought. He also confirmed that there would be full consultation around the process. He noted that there seemed to be confusion around whether the consultation process had begun. He confirmed the formal process had not yet begun but communication would be following from the Steering Group to confirm the next steps in the process and how the consultation and decisions would work.
- 10.25 Ankita Sinha, School of Business Convener, Students' Association asked whether consideration had been given to new scholarships for the international student market from counties where GDP is particularly low.
- 10.26 Rhiannan Ledwell, Vice President (Education) in the Students' Association confirmed that the student members of Senate had only received their invites to the recruitment presentations less than two hours before they took place.

- 10.27 Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Global Engagement) confirmed that, for those countries particularly impacted by adverse global economics, the value of the scholarships on offer had been increased from £5,000 to £8,000 for students from South Asia and West Africa. He added that work was ongoing currently to see what actions could be taken urgently to mitigate some of the costs that students are facing, although the details of this were not yet available.
- 10.28 As time for discussion had been exhausted in the meeting, the Principal confirmed that he was happy to meet individuals or groups outside the meeting, to discuss matters further.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

- 11.1 Neil Vargesson, on behalf of the Senate Assessors, reported on the meeting of Court held in September. Neil noted that there had been some discussion of finances at the meeting but acknowledged that following the meeting the position had changed. He further noted that there next meeting would have finance top of the agenda. He added that the Court strategy day had discussed the REF, student employability and external engagement to increase revenue.

LOCATION OF GRADUATIONS 2024

- 12.1 Tracey Slaven. University Secretary noted that the late paper about graduations included an apology to Senate, from her as Secretary, for the failure to comply with Ordinance 38. She recorded her thanks to those who had identified the oversight relating to the 1889 Ordinance from the new 'grey book'. As required by the Ordinance, Senate is required to agree the location of graduations. She noted that the recent use of P&J Live had been initiated to comply with distancing and ventilation requirements coming out of the pandemic. This was sustained as access to Elphinstone Hall was expected to be interrupted due to the proposed work in King's Quarter. This is not now happening as anticipated. As outlined in the paper, the two options now available are to contract with P&J Live to deliver graduations off-campus, with the associated benefits provided by the location, or for graduations return to campus using a combination of Elphinstone and a marquee, although exact details at this point were not yet certain. As previously, it had not been anticipated that Elphinstone would be available at this time, work would be required in terms of AV and disability access. Although detailed costings of the various options were still being prepared, Tracey noted her personal assessment, that ultimately there would be little difference between the two locations financially, once the associated costs of supporting a larger number of ceremonies were factored in.
- 12.2 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History recorded his thanks to the Secretary for the compilation of the new 'grey book' of Statutes and Ordinances. He noted that previously graduations were held in the Mitchell Hall and queried whether returning to the Mitchell Hall was a possibility?
- 12.3 Tracey responded confirming that Mitchell Hall was not compliant with Health and Safety legislation and would require significant capital expenditure to make it so and was therefore not a possible solution for 2024.
- 12.4 Miles Rothoerl, Vice-Chair Education, Students' Association noted that none of the options under discussion were ideal, however, he commented that graduation was an emotional moment for students and the students he had discussed options with were overwhelmingly against ceremonies being held somewhere detached from the campus where they have spent such an important part of their lives. He noted his understanding was that graduation location would have been reconsidered after the King's redevelopment work was complete and, now that work was not going ahead, the students he had consulted did not feel that TECA should become the new permanent home for graduation. He commented that if Senate were to decide that use of TECA should be

made for 2024 students, would be more supportive of the of the decision if facilities such as a shuttle bus and overnight gown hire could be provided, but with the student views he had received he would struggle to support the use of P&J Live at the current time.

- 12.5 Rhiannan Ledwell, Vice President (Education) in the Students' Association noted that two days was insufficient time to consult students however, amongst those consulted, there had been generally overwhelming support for not using P&J Live. She noted that she had been one of the Student Ambassadors handing out the surveys which had generate the figure of 92% satisfaction quoted in the paper, and that students are generally happy when they are graduating however, many of those she witnessed completing the survey, had commented on the venue despite being generally happy to have graduated. Rhiannan requested more time to consult students before a decision was required. Rhiannan noted that the paper implied that £430,000 could be saved by using a marquee on campus a not insignificant amount when spending was needing to be prioritised. Based on a figure of £20,000 per student, that money could be used to fund full scholarships for approximately 25 international students or could have been used to hire the academics needed to push forward work-based learning. She suggested that graduation seemed to be about projecting an image rather than investing in the student experience during students' studies. She questioned whether this was the best use of money.
- 12.6 Responding Tracey apologised if the numbers in the paper had misled, as she articulated previously, the figures in the paper for the marquee were the base costs and not the totality of the required spend. Money would need to be spent on other things, and the total costs would be broadly similar. Tracey clarified that any deferral of the decision would require the decision to be brought back to a future Senate meeting. An additional meeting would be required as Senate does not possess the power to take decisions by circulation.
- 12.7 Niels Imrie, School of Biological Sciences Convenor, Students' Association, noted his agreement with Rhiannon and drew Senate's attention to the Gaudie poll which had been released earlier in the afternoon. The majority of responses so far indicated a preference for Elphinstone Hall although he acknowledged a possible lack of communication with students regarding the practical difficulties associated with the venue. He therefore suggested that some extra time for students to reach an informed decision would be a good idea.
- 12.8 Karin Friedrich, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History noted a poll had been live since 9.45am that morning and 78% of students responding had indicated a preference for Elphinstone Hall and 98% of student respondents wished to be consulted on the venue. She also suggested that the separate issue of guests being charged should be considered as 75% of respondents did not wish guests to be charged. She also highlighted the traditions associated with having graduations held in an historic setting and the opportunity that offered for students and staff mingling together for photographs to mark the end of the academic journey together. Several disciplines within her school used to hold small receptions after the ceremony on campus. This was impossible in setting of the P&J Live. Karin also noted that the Principal had indicated he would be required to attend 23 ceremonies. Karin suggested that there should be no obligation for the Principal or Senior Vice-Principal to attend every ceremony.
- 12.9 The Principal noted he had not been referring to his time in particular, but he had been thinking of all the staff time required to support the ceremonies. He highlighted that he had been referring to the fifty or so individuals required to support each ceremony. Personally, he was content to turn up for as many ceremonies as required but the total workload needed to be factored into the decision.
- 12.10 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition outlined her desire to see, not just the number of ceremonies quantified in the paper, but also the time required. She noted some elements of the ceremony were of a fixed length and some variable: the opening remarks for example were fixed, but each ceremony in Elphinstone would have

fewer students so would be quicker in terms of getting the throughput of students. She suggested the headline figure of the increased number of ceremonies was misleading.

- 12.11 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science noted that in order to make an informed decision, it was necessary to have full costings for both options. In addition, she highlighted that if Elphinstone and Linklater were to be used for any events in the future, they would be required to be made accessible anyway.
- 12.12 Delma Childers, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition asked how staff costings are factored into consideration. Members of Professional Services staff in the School have raised concerns, although they love to celebrate with their students and approximately 10 staff had helped with the summer ceremonies. With each ceremony requiring around four hours of each individual staff member's time an increased number of ceremonies would require substantially more of staff time to support the ceremonies.
- 12.13 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences, reported that when teaching final year geology students earlier in the day and asking if they would prefer to graduate on campus or at P&J Live, the overwhelming majority had indicated a preference for campus although one student had indicated a preference for P&J in order to be able have more family attend. He also reported that administrative staff dislike helping at graduations as it takes them away from other aspects of their jobs. He noted it was not any easy matter to take a decision on.
- 12.14 Malcolm Harvey, School of Social Science expressed support for all the points made so far on both sides and noted pros and cons to each option he noted a personal preference, shared by several staff in Social Science, against P&J Live. He highlighted a factor closely associated with the current financial position, that of marketing. He noted the 'free marketing' associated with students sharing photos taken on campus via the various social media platforms which cannot be quantified financially. He noted that a delay in the decision would necessitate a further meeting, but he would welcome the opportunity for further consultation before making a decision.
- 12.15 The Principal noted that Tracey would advise on the details of due process but noted that if a decision were not taken during the meeting, it must be taken soon, otherwise the opportunity for using P&J Live would lapse.
- 12.16 Chris Collins, Head of School, Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture noted a personal preference for ceremonies to be held in Old Aberdeen, however, he commented that he finds himself supporting them being held at P&J Live. He explained that this was for several reasons: firstly Elphinstone, and King's campus, generally was not accessible; secondly the larger capacity at P&J means large families and groups are able to attend the ceremonies; thirdly, the consistency of the experience offered by P&J Live was much higher as the venue is entirely sheltered from the weather; finally, he noted that the amount of time taken up by a larger number of ceremonies, at a time when workloads are so high, is a significant argument in favour of P&J Live.
- 12.17 Ainhoa Burgos, Vice-President (Communities) Students' Association, noted that the introduction of charging for guest tickets was making graduation less accessible and more of a privilege. She noted that students were already paying around £70 for gown hire and asked if there would still be a charge for guest tickets in Elphinstone Hall?
- 12.18 Scott Allen, Business School noted a request from his School to introduce a possible light-touch, hardship exemption for ticket charges and queried whether the comparable costs of the two venues factored in staff costs?
- 12.19 Beth Lord, Head of School, Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History suggested a possible alternative approach: holding the ceremonies at P&J Live with some social events to be held on King's campus giving students the opportunity for the photos etc on the historic campus. This could be low cost and optional and would offer a 'happy medium' approach.

- 12.20 Val Speirs, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition reported the result of a quick poll of postgraduate students earlier in the day had overwhelmingly supported holding graduations on campus. She noted that the distance out of town also raised access issues for getting to P&J Live in terms of transport and parking charges.
- 12.21 A member of the Students' Association noted the results from a student poll held earlier in the day: a total of 155 responses were received of which 55 contained written comments. Two common themes could be seen: students do not have any connection to P&J Live and wish to be able to show off the historic campus where they have spent the majority of their studies; and also the cost of tickets, mainly coming from international students, who have already paid significant sums in fees and do not see why they should pay for graduation tickets in addition.
- 12.22 The Principal noted the very small number of responses to the survey when viewed in the context of the entire student body of nearly 20,000, and the danger of drawing too many conclusions from such a small survey.
- 12.23 Khalifa Muhammad, School of Law Convener, Students' Association, noted similar responses from students he had spoken to being more comfortable with King's as they had a greater sense of belonging and so would prefer campus, if possible.
- 12.24 Joanne Anderson, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History queried why, if the costs were broadly similar, would we be choosing to spend this outside the University? And shouldn't buildings on King's becoming accessible be the default in any case? She also queried, in the context of fundraising, whether the opportunity should be taken to look for sponsorship for creating accessible venues on campus. She noted that Michell Hall is housed in a spectacular location, within the second largest granite building in the world and it seemed wrong that it was not in use. She questioned whether there was a long-term strategy to care for and use the University's historic buildings?
- 12.25 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History noted that from both students and, almost all, staff present a clear picture was emerging. He further noted, however, that it felt wrong to be charging for tickets to attend graduation ceremonies, but it felt right that graduations should be held on campus at the university.
- 12.26 Will Barras, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, queried the issue of time noting the paper detailed that a marquee could accommodate 12 ceremonies over five days and asked how many ceremonies would be needed at P&J Live?
- 12.27 Responding to the points made, Tracey again apologised for the late circulation of the paper having resulted in relatively little time for consultation and that detailed wider costs were not included as these were still being worked on. She confirmed that a large marquee could be used to deliver ceremonies over five days as with P&J Live; costs were still being worked on and much of the additional cost of ceremonies on campus would occur from buying in services on campus, provided as part of the venue at P&J Live for example, the AV system and associated staffing, required to be bought in for a marquee. Although there were various possible combinations, it was anticipated that costs would be broadly similar between the two locations. Tracey clarified the process if Senate did not take a decision at the meeting: Senate required two weeks' notice of a meeting, generally preceded by a further week for Senate Business Committee although this may be avoidable for a single item discussion, this created a risk that deferring a decision risked the decision being taken by default as a contract with P&J Live should have been signed a week previously and other organisations had requested the venue for the same dates. Tracey asked Senate to confirm whether they wished to defer the decision or were content to vote on the matter at the meeting.
- 12.28 After some discussion, Malcom Harvey, School of Social Science proposed, and the request was widely supported, that Senate should hold a vote on whether a vote should be held on the decision at the meeting.
- 12.29 Senate voted 52 votes in favour of having a vote and 44 votes against having a vote. The motion to hold a vote on location was therefore carried.

- 12.30 Senate then held a vote to determine whether graduations would be held at P&J Live, with the details of any possible alternate location to return to Senate at a future date. Senate voted 22 in favour of P&J Live, 12 abstentions and 77 votes against P&J Live.

REIMAGINING THE CAMPUSES

- 13.1 Morag Beers, Director of Estates and Facilities, gave a [presentation](#) to Senate on the work of the Reimagining the Campuses Project Board established in support of developments to underpin the Aberdeen 2040 Vision.
- 13.2 Following the presentation, Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal highlighted that there was a process for the campus works that members of Senate, and the wider community, would be able to contribute to the project through.
- 13.3 Karl further highlighted the need for a financial recovery plan and the cost of the estate within that plan, resulting in the need for the estate to operate as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. He noted the need to address the different ways of working post-pandemic together with the ways in which the delivery of research and education would change in the coming years as being areas of particular interest to Senate and encouraged members to contribute through the various opportunities being provided. He further noted the feedback gathered through the development of Aberdeen 2040 had highlighted that the University had a combination of too much estate together with the wrong sort of facilities.
- 13.4 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science added that in addition to looking at future space for the Business School, space for the Museum and its collections should be factored in.
- 13.5 Morag confirmed that the use of every building would be looked at to identify the critical issues that needed to be addressed.
- 13.6 Andre Justin Carpio, School of Medicine Convenor, Students' Association, asked when the Polwarth Building was expected to reopen following the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) closures? He noted that the closure was impacting on in person teaching due to the relocation away from Foresterhill making it more difficult for clinicians to balance NHS and Teaching activities.
- 13.7 Morag confirmed that work was ongoing to prioritise the various capital projects required to address RAAC. She confirmed that the reopening of the Polwarth auditorium was one of the key priorities identified. She noted she was unable to give a precise date, but she was working closely with the School to ensure the criticalities were addressed.
- 13.8 Aravinda Guntipalli, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition noted that the bus transport between the campuses ceasing at 6pm meant that it was difficult to organise student facing events after hours and it hampered participation in interdisciplinary events focused on Old Aberdeen.
- 13.9 Responding, Karl noted how expensive the bus link was to run.
- 13.10 Tracey noted that the Sustainability Team had been looking at the bus link which had historically been supported by the car parking charges. She noted that this was no longer viable due to a combination of declining car park use and the substantial increase in the cost of providing the bus services. She confirmed that the matter continued to be kept under review including possible alternative provision moving forwards.
- 13.11 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity. History, Philosophy & Art History noted the incredible portfolio of properties owned by the University and queried whether the campus project would look at opportunities for maximising income from the buildings including optimising possible rental income.
- 13.12 Morag confirmed that part of the exercise would include an asset plan for all buildings which would look at whether buildings remain as part of the operational estate or are used

commercially. Another part would look at the rationalisation and possible disposal of non-core residential properties.

- 13.13 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences highlighted the pressures on lab space at King's campus in the context of finding space for new equipment. He noted that an examination of the balance between the use of research and teaching space would be useful.
- 13.14 Karl confirmed that this would be an integral part of the process.
- 13.15 Euan Bain, School of Engineering asked whether part of the Reimagining the Campus project would include a space which could support graduations as well as introducing a graduation ceremony earlier in the year for January start students?
- 13.16 Morag confirmed that part of the work would include consideration of provision of a flat, flexible space which could be used for graduation ceremonies.
- 13.17 Martin Barker, School of Biological Sciences noted the possible commercial opportunities offered by cruise ships visiting Aberdeen with people coming to campus but there being no provision made for visitors in terms of catering etc.
- 13.18 Morag confirmed this was something which was very much part of the plan.
- 13.19 Tracey confirmed that this was something already under consideration but the planning application to provide catering at the weekend remained stuck with the Council, as it had been for approximately five months, following objections from the local community.
- 13.20 Iliia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked whether there were data about accessibility and teaching rooms and whether the project would make all teaching rooms accessible?
- 13.21 Morag confirmed that one of the project groups was looking specifically at inclusivity, accessibility and wellness and a survey was already underway, but she did not yet have the numbers from the survey.
- 13.22 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition noted that the current project relied on people coming forward with current problems, but she asked what was being done to ensure that campus would be able to accommodate the needs of the next generation of academics.
- 13.23 Morag confirmed the project intended to be proactive in gathering input from all to ensure future needs are factored in to work as it is undertaken.
- 13.24 The Principal noted that the project was not just about the physical infrastructure but also included ensuring the provision of a world class digital infrastructure for education and research in the future.

RESEARCH CULTURE

- 14.1 Nick Forsyth, Vice Principal (Research) introduced a [presentation](#) to Senate highlighting ongoing work around enhancing research culture in the context of REF 2028. He noted that 'culture' was really about everything that is undertaken in the context of research, and he would be drawing on input from three of the Research Deans, Gary Macfarlane, Andrew Dilley and Stuart Piertney.
- 14.2 Gary MacFarlane initially focussed on the work he had been undertaking around Research Culture and impact (slides 4-7).
- 14.3 In the context of working in partnership, Beth Lord, Head of School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History talked about plans being put together with Robert Gordon's University (RGU) to put together a high-profile public lecture series, with the working title of Aberdeen Public Lecture Series. The intention of the work was to put together a series of very high-profile public lectures, open to all in a city centre venue, working with Aberdeen Performing Arts of the City Museum to host the event. Beth noted that the potential benefits, in research culture and environments, from the project were substantial in terms of REF. She noted that the initial benefits to the University came from community engagement and civic presence. Beth noted that the project was in its early stages but

in due course the steering group would be soliciting views from the wider University community.

- 14.4 Nick also provided updates on ongoing work with the Research Centres (slides 8 & 9) and Postgraduate Research (slides 10 & 11).
- 14.5 Aravinda Guntipalli, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition asked for details of the plans for engagement in the context of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).
- 14.6 Nick responded confirming that EDI works through the EDI Committee structure, but that it was expected that EDI be integrated into the REF narrative to enable statistics to be drawn upon as required enabling identification of areas for improvement. He noted that research culture was not about the institution saying everything was right with research but rather research culture was about the institution identifying where things might be better and developing strategies to improve things.
- 14.7 Andre Justin Carpio, School of Medicine Convenor, Students' Association, highlighted the work being done by the Medical School to include younger undergraduates in Medicine and Medical Sciences in research work through the Inspire and ASRS programmes. He noted that a lot of medical students and supervisors are highly committed to research, as well as in other disciplines. He noted there were a lot of students who were keen to get some publishable work. He queried whether similar programmes to those linking students with supervisors in medicine existed in the wider University and if not was this something which should be widened?
- 14.8 Nick commented that he was supportive of all undergraduate students gaining research experience and noted that, in disciplines outside medicine, there was often a formal dissertation as part of the programme which was fulfilling this important function.
- 14.9 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History queried the position of junior researchers particularly within the Research Centres. She noted the trend across the Russell Group to include junior members of staff as possible directors of Research Centres. She queried the framework in place to enable such mobility within the University's structures, asking whether the opportunity of involvement with the public lecture series would also be open to a junior staff member producing high quality research.
- 14.10 Responding Gary confirmed there were no fixed structures determining who could be involved with Research Centres and the Centres had been encouraged to be as inclusive as possible with the result that a lot of the centres include significant numbers of junior staff. He noted that submissions to the centres often include work from postgraduate and undergraduate researchers that aligned with the work of the centre.
- 14.11 Alessandra further queried the possibility of rotating leaders for the centres to permit more junior staff to experience mobility opportunities.
- 14.12 Gary confirmed that although there were no specific rules, he felt this was a good principle and he would encourage Research Centres to think about how this could be adopted. Also, for Centres to think about succession planning and how to include the next generation.
- 14.13 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science noted that one of the key strands of the previous Vice Principal's approach was Research Leave which was included in the paper but the other two strands, visiting scholars and pump prime funding, were not included and she queried whether priorities had changed. She also noted that she had received feedback around REF 2028 and the institutional statement around research culture and there was concern around recent communications for the uncertainty for some colleagues. She queried whether there were measures in place to prioritise in terms of REF and the research culture.
- 14.14 Responding, Nick noted that the REF action plan did include actions around research leave; the pump priming fund was receiving consideration to determine how best to apply it in the coming months; and the decision had been taken not to progress with the visiting

scholar scheme at the current time. This decision would be kept under review and the possibility of incorporating external schemes, such as the competitive Royal Society Scheme for bidding for visiting scholars, might be utilised.

- 14.15 Dragan Jovicic, School of Engineering, asked, in the context of the Research Centres, for more clarity on their role within research culture and the overall governance of research within the University. He welcomed the common webpage approach outlined in the presentation and noted that a similar approach for the activities of the centres would be welcomed as some of the reporting activities of the centres was duplicating the activities being undertaken by schools.
- 14.16 Gary confirmed the Research Centres were created to represent the areas of research strength within the University. However, he noted that there were differences between them in terms of their size and operation. Operational flexibility was a key part of their establishment although all centres were required to possess a critical mass, have a clear strategy and undertake enabling activities for that. Gary confirmed that the desire not to duplicate reporting had been behind the decision to automatically generate the majority of reports based on the information held in University systems. However, some Centre specific reporting was still required. For this to be effective, staff need to link their work to Centres, as appropriate, within systems.
- 14.17 Euan Bain, School of Engineering suggested that, in the spirit of enhancing research culture, and Aberdeen 2040, the use of the terms 'junior academic and junior researcher' were no longer appropriate. Early career/undergraduate/PGT researcher were far more appropriate terms to use.
- 14.18 Nick agreed that this was an excellent point.
- 14.19 In closing the Research discussion, the Principal noted that if there were still further points to be made, members should contact Nick directly.

ABERDEEN 2040 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS

- 15.1 John Barrow, Dean of Employability & Entrepreneurship provided Senate with a [presentation](#) updating them on the new set of graduate attributes, the Aberdeen 2040 Attributes and Skills, developed in support of the strategic plan. He also outlined a new Framework to support the use of the attributes and skills with students. Senate's input was sought specifically on the proposed Framework and the proposed changes to the attributes themselves highlighted in the presentation and accompanying paper.
- 15.2 Fiona Stoddard, School of Business, sought clarification on how the current testing and trial outlined in the presentation was being communicated to students and whether staff were required to do more to disseminate.
- 15.3 John confirmed that specific, targeted groups (specific Business School courses and courses in Medical Sciences) were using the system at this stage although any student could access the system and staff should feel free to promote the changes to students.
- 15.4 One of the Students' Association School Conveners asked whether this was something they should be promoting actively to class reps and students generally?
- 15.5 John confirmed that this would be something he would be supportive of.
- 15.6 Ankita Sinha, School of Business Convener, Students' Association asked if students seeking specialised employment rather than generic graduate entry level positions were catered for in the new system?
- 15.7 Rhiannan Ledwell, Vice President (Education), Students' Association confirmed that all Class Reps had been sent details of the MySkills software as part of their welcome pack. AUSA were seeking to integrate the framework from the outset. She noted that the Framework appeared more helpful to students in terms of building a CV and highlighting achievements than the previous process of inclusion on the transcript.

- 15.8 Fred Byrne, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History Convener, Students' Association asked for explanation of the context of the Attributes in preparing graduates for the future when the future, currently, was under threat from so many other forces. He noted that the University website detailed £1.4M investment in fossil fuel projects and asked when the University would divest from these?
- 15.9 The Principal suggested that the future of the planet was maybe better covered in a future meeting rather than being solely a concern as part a discussion of graduate attributes.
- 15.10 Matthew Collinson, School of Natural & Computing Sciences noted that there appeared to be quite a lot of added bureaucracy to tracking the information required for the system and asked if consideration had been given to the workload implications of the system?
- 15.11 Martin Barker, School of Biological Sciences, welcomed the proposal but expressed concern that MySkills would make students aware of the explicit skills they were developing in terms of job applications etc. but he noted that there was no specific reference to the National Student Survey (NSS) in the proposal. He expressed the view that it might be useful to incorporate something which would prepare students more explicitly for responding the NSS.
- 15.12 Karin Friedrich, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History noted that, although skills were an important part of University education, there did not seem to be any inclusion of the awareness of knowledge acquisition side of education in the system.
- 15.13 Dave Cornwell, School of Geosciences queried whether there were plans to permit research students to benefit from the system as well as taught students?
- 15.14 Jo Hicks, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture asked about the balance between providing a platform for recording micro-course skills output and a platform for recording activity more generally. He noted that in terms of the next steps there appeared the possibility that it might develop separately from the curriculum and suggested that the more integrated with courses and programmes it was, the better it could be.
- 15.15 Responding to the points made John noted:
- Students were not required to use the system and students coming in to undertake courses for a very specific reasons would not be required to engage with the system if they did not wish.
 - He confirmed that the workload implications were being considered seriously and that changes to the course and programme review documentation to accommodate the system would be considered. The intention was not to create a burdensome system.
 - He commented that there was the possibility of incorporating specific things to assist with NSS, Graduate Outcomes and other post-graduation surveys.
 - John confirmed that knowledge had to be at the heart of what the University provided but suggested that the system was intended to highlight the skills utilised to gain the required knowledge. While acknowledging differences between disciplines, he noted that this was something which was increasingly being sought by employers who were looking to appoint graduates with specific skills over and above discipline specific knowledge. Knowledge would be part of the whole rather than a separate section of the Framework.
 - John committed to take the challenge of incorporating research students away for consideration.
 - John noted that the use of the term micro-course was intended to equate to individual activities or tasks undertaken as part of something larger rather than solely credit bearing courses.

UPDATES TO THE ELECTED COMPOSITION OF SENATE

- 16.1 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary outlined the proposed updating of the elected academic membership of Senate to reflect changes to the size of schools over the period since the last review. She noted the basis for the calculations reflected the share of staff

and students across the University. She assured Senate that rounded numbers were not used in the calculations. She highlighted that the paper outlined adjustments proposed for the 2024 elections and for one school in the 2026 elections to move to the new distribution of members. Tracey indicated that if substantial discussion were required the paper would return to a future meeting.

- 16.2 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences asked three questions: was it appropriate to be undertaking the exercise at a time of reorganisation, when a further revision might be required soon? He noted that the proposed number of Senators in the sciences was down and queried whether this was a situation that Senate was comfortable with? He also noted that the revised figures, by incorporating student numbers, favoured education over research and queried whether this was appropriate.
- 16.3 Responding, based on the mathematics behind the figures, Tracey confirmed that the shifts in membership resulted from the combined effects of rises in student numbers in some areas and declines in others much of which could be attributed to Brexit which had impacted most on STEM subjects. In the context of the point about timing, Tracey expressed the view that a considerable amount of time had elapsed since amendments were last made to the membership and that she felt, going forwards, it was appropriate that amendments were made now as the nature of any structural changes were unknown at the present time. Tracey also confirmed that the numbers were based on total staff figures and research staff were included in those.
- 16.4 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science queried when the numbers would next be reviewed.
- 16.5 Tracey confirmed her expectation that, going forward, the membership would be reviewed every three to five years. As the term of appointment for members being four years, she favoured review every five years.
- 16.6 Karin Friedrich, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History proposed a formal vote. This was seconded by Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science. The Principal moved to a formal vote the proposed revisions to membership.
- 16.7 Senate voted to approve the proposed changes: 60 votes in favour, 15 abstentions and 5 votes against.
- 16.8 The Principal closed the formal business of the meeting.

ROUTINE BUSINESS:

URC REPORT TO SENATE

- 17.1 Senate noted the routine report from the University Research Committee

UEC REPORT TO SENATE

- 18.1 Senate noted the routine report from the University Education Committee

QAC REPORT TO SENATE

- 19.1 Senate noted the routine report from the Quality Assurance Committee

SENATE ELECTIONS

- 20.1 Senate noted the outcomes of the recent elections.