

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

**Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 14 March 2017**

*Present:* Principal, Professor Kilburn, Haites, Paterson, McGeorge, Hannaford, Ross Morrison and Welch, Dr M Bain, Mr M Whittington, Professors Paton, Sahraie, Skakle, Guz, Wells and Brown Dr R Neilson, Professor Masthoff and Shennan Dr M Ehrenscheidtner, Dr P Bishop, Mrs D Bruxvoort, Mrs L Tibbetts, Dr J Lamb, Dr L McCann, Professor Hutchison, Dr A Sim, Professor Schaper, Dr R Shanks, Dr D R Smith, Dr A Bryzgel, Dr M Mills, Dr A Oelsner, Dr T Argounova-Low, Professor Anderson, Dr D Lusseau, Professor Pinard, Dr J Baird, Dr K Kiezebrink, Dr M Macdiarmid, Dr A Jenkinson, Dr N Mody, Dr D MacCallum, Dr S Fielding, Dr K Foster, Professor Lee, Dr F Thies, Dr E Nordmann, Dr K Pilz, Professor Jovicic, Dr E Pavlovskaja, Professor Kashtalyan, Dr O Menshykov, Dr J Oliver, Dr C North, Professor Coghill and Grebogi, Dr da Silva Baptista, Dr B Martin, Dr N Oren, Mr L Fuller, Mr D Kaminek, and Miss D Parsons,

*Apologies:* Professors Glover and MacGregor, Ms AM Slater, Professors Irwin, Heys, Jolley, Dr A Arnason, Professor Campbell, Naphy and Connolly, Professor Lurie and Kee, Dr M Beaton, Professor Nimmo, Dr P Sweeney, Dr H Pierce, Dr P Ziegler, Mrs M Stephen, Dr T Rist, Dr A Lewis, Dr B Tribout, Professor Mealor, Dr Z Yihdego, Mr S Styles, Professor Johnson, Professor J Jayasinghe, Dr A Rajnicek, Dr M Delibegović, Dr G Macfarlane, Dr D Scott, Dr N Vargesson, Dr R MacKenzie, Dr A Venkatesh, Professor Barker, Dr I Cameron, Dr D Ray, Professors Akisanya, Dr B Rea, Dr N Schofield, Dr A Ebinghaus, Professor J Feldmann, Dr W Vasconcelos, Professor Brittain, Dr C Black, Mr C Anucha, Miss A Boerkoel, Miss M Leskovska, Mr K Thomson-Duncan, Miss K Metcalfe, Miss K Halop, Miss D Passinke, Mr M Hickman, Mr L Budrass, Miss C Henssen, Miss L Rossi, Miss A Hall, Mr N Lazaroz, Mr A Edirisooriya, Miss E Harding and Miss J Killin

- 39.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members to an extraordinary meeting of the Senate. The Principal invited members to approve the agenda as presented. As no comments were raised, the agenda was taken to be approved and the meeting proceeded.

**PARTNERSHIPS ACTIVITY IN QATAR –  
AFG LIMITED PROPOSED QATAR (DOHA) CAMPUS**

- 40.1 The Senate received the paper on proposed Partnership Activity in Qatar and specifically the proposal to set up a branch campus in partnership with the Al Faleh Group for Education (AFG Limited) in Doha, Qatar. Introducing the paper, Professor Paterson, Vice Principal for Internationalisation, stated that the paper provided the Senate with extensive detail on the proposal. He informed the Senate that the proposed collaboration would allow the University to make a significant contribution to the development of the higher education sector in Qatar and to strengthen the University's profile in a key priority region.
- 40.2 In advance of progressing to a discussion of Partnerships Activity in Qatar more widely, the Principal noted two questions had been posed to him by Senators. He invited Dr Sim and Mrs Tibbetts, both representatives of the Business School, to ask their questions.
- 40.3 Dr Sim stated his interest with regards the apparent difference between the position as presented in the paper with regards security and the UK government's current advice on the dangers for foreigners travelling to the area, including the danger of an imminent terrorist attack. Dr Sim noted that while the World Cup, to be held in Qatar in 2022, would attract a heavy security detail, this may leave other areas, such as a UK University campus, open as a soft target. Dr Sim asked the Principal what mitigating steps the University would take to protect its staff and students in the area.

- 40.4 The Principal asked Professor Paterson to respond. Professor Paterson stated the importance of security for staff and students not just in Qatar, where he noted the terrorist threat level as 3 out of 5, but also at home within the UK where the threat level stands higher, at 4 out of 5. Professor Paterson assured Dr Sim, and the Senate as a whole, of the importance placed on security, of the University's International travel arrangement policy and of taking any and all recommended steps to ensuring the safety of staff and students at all times. Dr Sim stated he was reassured by Professor Paterson's response.
- 40.5 Mrs Tibbetts informed the Principal that she was, in principle, supportive of the proposed partnership in Qatar and recognised the importance of the income such a project would generate, however, stated her concern regarding the resourcing issues currently being experienced by the Business School in both academic and administrative teams. Mrs Tibbetts further noted that the School was already overstretched and that the income generated by way of visits to the Qatar campus was unlikely to cover costs of staffing the proposal. Mrs Tibbetts asked the Principal to confirm that, if the proposal was to be approved, appropriate resourcing would be provided and that resources would not be constrained to visit income alone. Mrs Tibbetts further asked for confirmation that the School could be permitted to move immediately to recruit staff to meet current gaps, namely professors of Accounting and Finance and two senior lecturers in Accounting and Finance.
- 40.6 The Principal, in responding, stated that it would not be possible for him to offer confirmation in this regard. He noted that resourcing was not a matter for the Senate but for the Head of the Business School. The Principal reminded the Senate that Schools unable to resource delivery, would be able to say no to their involvement.
- 40.7 The Principal invited Mr Whittington, Deputy Dean of the Business School, to comment on the proposed partnership. Mr Whittington stated the importance for the School of TNE and of taking good opportunities when they become available. He informed the Senate that the Qatar proposal was credible, that the partner was trusted and that the School felt that they could work well with them. He further stated the seriousness with which the management team were taking the proposal and, while recognising that there may be resourcing issues, the importance of moving quickly to finalise timescales and short and long term strategies for delivery.
- 40.8 The Principal moved to invite the Senate to comment on the paper and consequently, a discussion ensued. The main tenets of the discussion were as follows:
- Dr Nordmann expressed serious concern to the Senate regarding the illegality of homosexuality in Qatar. Dr Nordmann stated that there is no protection for homosexuals within the country and that, as a consequence of the Country's adherence to Sharia law, it is considered a crime potentially punishable by death. Referring to the paper, Dr Nordmann stated that a western education experience could not be provided as a consequence. Dr Nordmann further noted concern with regard to the marked difference in maternity leave provided under Qatari and UK legislation. Dr Nordmann specifically sought answers to the following questions:
    - Does the University consider the inability of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) staff or students to receive a western education experience an acceptable cost of the proposed partnership?
    - Would staff in Qatar be entitled to the 39 week maternity leave legislated in the UK or the 7 weeks provided under Qatari legislation?
  - Professor Paterson, responding to Dr Nordmann, noted her concerns and acknowledged that there were limits to which the University could contravene Qatari law. He stated that moves to develop and modernise the country were ongoing and emphasised the role a University presence within the country could play in influencing such positive change. The Principal added that maternity leave would not be a problem. Professor Paterson assured the Senate that the University was not blind to the challenges posed within Qatar and that the partner, AFG, had specifically sought the University's reputation and approach.

- Professor Wells emphasised the values shared by the University and AFG, as a company and as a group of individuals. Professor Wells noted the work of AFG in improving the rights of women and minority groups and provided the example of a refusal by the company to allow for separate entrances for men and women to their campus building, to the Senate as demonstrating the steps, albeit small, being taken in this regard,
- Professor Masthoff echoed her support for the points made by Dr Nordmann. She noted her concern that the University would not have entered into partnership in South Africa during the period of Apartheid. She further stated concern regarding the entry requirements to the programme and quality assurance aspects of the proposal.
- Responding, Professor Paterson acknowledged Professor Masthoff's concerns but assured the Senate that during Apartheid, had an Institution welcomed all races and a partnership proposed, the University would have sought to take the same approach. Professor Ross further added that during Apartheid, the School of Law had publically maintained a relationship with the University of Capetown. She stated the importance of influence through Education.
- Responding regarding the Quality Assurance aspects raised by Professor Masthoff, Professor Wells assured the Senate that the proposed foundation year would be equitable to foundation years already accepted by the University for Advanced Entry to degree programmes.
- Dr Nordmann noted her support for the steps taken by AFG to put a stop to gender segregation, however, stated that identifying as LGBT is, in Qatar, a crime punishable by death. She expressed concern that these particular rights will not change.
- Dr Da Silva Baptista echoed Dr Nordmann's concerns and sought reassurance that where staff may find themselves in trouble, by contravening laws not applicable within the UK, protection for them would be in place.
- Professor Paterson noted Dr Nordmann's concern. He stated that change in-country was slow but that the rights of women had seen recent significant improvement. Responding to Dr Da Silva Baptista, he stated the importance of staff complying with the laws and norms of countries they travel to.
- Professor Ross, Vice-Principal for People Strategy, informed the Senate that while Athena Swan did not extend to non-UK partnerships, that there would be an expectation that the University would seek to uphold standards in all aspects of its work. Professor Ross noted the need to comply or be respectful of the laws of other countries but that this does not prevent steps to try an influence positive change.
- Dr Mills asked whether there would be a requirement of staff to disclose information, such a students' sexuality, if a student confided in them. Dr Mills was assured that such a role would be considered pastoral and, as such, confidential.
- Dr Lusseau expressed concern regarding the risk of rumours regarding staff or students. He sought reassurance that those in such a situation could be protected. Professor Ross confirmed that University staff could be removed from the region in such extreme circumstances, however, noted that the students would be local and therefore the same would not apply.
- Dr Smith expressed his support for the proposal as a consequence of the opportunity for influencing positive change through such engagement. He stated the importance of intercultural dialogue in working towards modernisation in Qatar and the benefits which could potentially be achieved through the promotion of the University's teaching and pedagogy in the region.
- Mr Fuller, on behalf of the Students' Association, noted that he had received many emails from the student population on the matter. He acknowledged the need for the University to diversify income streams but noted that the issues surrounding human rights could not be ignored.
- Dr Shanks, on behalf of her constituency, expressed concern at the ability of the University to construct a curriculum and convert courses for teaching in Qatar in the timescales prescribed. She asked other than financial income, what benefits there were for the University.

- Responding, Professor Paterson referred to the paper in detail the benefits to the University. He referenced the TNE strategy, student recruitment and research collaboration potential within the region.
- Dr Mills stated the need for the University to be aware of Education in the Middle East as an agenda. Professor Paterson acknowledged this point and agreed that the University must be alert to agendas and cultural norms. He stated that the University must adopt a firm approach and be prepared to remain true to its values.
- Professor Wells stated the importance of Quality Assuring the proposed partnership and having a member of University staff based in Qatar to oversee such issues. He informed the Senate of the inclusion within the proposal of School visits to the campus, twice per course, and, although no decision had yet been taken on how long these should be, estimated that they would be 2-3 days in length.
- Dr Oliver noted concern as to the advanced nature of the timescale proposed. Professor Paterson reassured the Senate that a foundation year would be taught first, with University delivery commencing in January 2018 and not September 2017.
- Professor Jovcic noted the knowledge and experience of Dr Imbabi from the School of Engineering in researching in the Middle East. Professor Paterson noted this with thanks. Professor Jovcic further noted the risk of political exposure, or vulnerability to corruption, within the country, an issue for the awareness of University management. He also expressed concern that AFG was a very different potential partner from TNE (partnering with the University in Rwanda) and did not have the same level of experience in delivering Higher Education.
- Professor Paterson acknowledged the issue of political exposure and assured Senators that no risks had been identified in this regard. Professor Wells agreed with Professor Jovcic in acknowledging that AFG was not currently a provider of higher education. Professor Wells noted the higher degree of interaction between the University and AFG than between the University and TNE as a consequence.
- Professor Anderson noted concern that the paper did not state all the facts of the proposed partnership, such as a deviation from the University's agreed equality and diversity policy and detailed information on resourcing. He requested the submission of a revised, more accurate, paper.
- Professor Paterson acknowledged Professor Anderson's points, however, noted that the business decision was one for the operating board and that the issue of resource had already been addressed by the Principal (*minute point 40.6 above refers*).
- Dr Martin asked why, when the same assessments would be used in Rwanda, this was not the proposal for Qatar. Professor Wells stated that, subject to appropriate contextualisation, the same assessments would be used, where appropriate.
- Dr Martin also expressed concern regarding the disruption staff visiting Qatar may cause in Aberdeen and sought reassurance that staff who did not wish to go would not be forced. Dr Martin was reassured that no member of staff would be forced to travel.
- Professor Hutchison expressed concern that the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) had not seen, nor approved, the final version of the paper. Professor Shennan, Convener of the QAC, confirmed that the QAC had been issued the same version of the paper being considered by the Senate. Professor Hutchison expressed concern that this paper did not detail proposals to undertake teaching at level 3, commencing in September 2017.

40.9 The Principal thanked Senators for their input and confirmed a vote would now be taken on whether or not the University should proceed with the proposal to set up a branch campus in Doha, Qatar.

In favour of the proposal to set up a branch campus in Doha, Qatar:	33
Not in favour of the proposal to set up a branch campus in Doha, Qatar:	20
Abstaining from the vote:	6

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the decision taken by the Senate was to move forward with the proposal to set up a branch campus in Doha, Qatar.