UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2022


MATTER ARISING:
MOTION SUPPORTING SCHOLARS DISPLACED BY THE OCCUPATION OF UKRAINE

59.1 David Anderson, School of Social Science, began by thanking the Senior Management Team (SMT) for their response to the conflict in Ukraine and the provision of assistance in the form of Honorary Fellowships. He proposed a further mandate in relation to the support offered by the University to assist academics who have been displaced as a result of the occupation of Ukraine. David detailed the importance of not discriminating against Russian or Belarussian academics and the need to support researchers/academics regardless of their nationality. David proposed that Senate should take the lead on similar issues and that the University’s Ukraine Support Group serves as a good model of how elected Senators can work collaboratively with the Senior Management Team (SMT) in order to develop and implement similar initiatives. The motion was approved there being no objection thereto.

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

60.1 The Principal addressed Senators in relation to the removal of COVID-19 restrictions, and advised that this should help to improve the balance between teaching and research within the Institution, as well as the work-life balance.

60.2 The Principal advised members that the University will soon be announcing another round of recruitment within professional services and academic staffing. He advised members that the University’s overall revenue has increased by £20 million which has helped to facilitate the investment and recruitment process. The Principal clarified that the estimated revenue for next year is expected to be broadly similar, however, £12m of the projected increase is already allocated to rising costs including energy, National Insurance and the National Pay Award.

60.3 Scott Styles, School of Law, asked for an update on the work being undertaken on the University’s buildings and how the increase in inflation (+10%) has affected the process. The Principal advised that the scoping work for Johnston and King’s College is proceeding and that there are rising costs associated with the projects. He advised members that the costs cannot be confirmed until the matter has been to tender with contractors. He informed members that the matter could return to Court, if necessary, in order to request an extension to the budget.

60.4 Colin North, School of Geosciences, asked how many of the new support posts will be dedicated to enhancing disability support services across the University, such as the Learning Support Unit, with a view to supporting international students in particular. He explained that international students do not qualify for student disability support allowance, therefore, they may not receive the same level of direct support as Home students. The Secretary recognised the importance of the issue and stated that discussions are underway with various directorates to determine the priorities. She advised members that there are funds that can be accessed by students under those circumstances. The Secretary informed Colin that she would take the matter away for further consideration and return to him directly.

60.5 Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, asked what is currently being done to support the mental health of colleagues in the interests of achieving a work-life balance and to combat the recent pressures of the pandemic. Nick Edwards, Acting Deputy Director of People, advised members that work has been undertaken to address the mental health of colleagues in the form of various HR practices and policies, including the recently launched Mental Health and Well-being Strategy, and the recent expansion of the University’s counselling services to include University staff. Nick recommended consulting the various staff
communications that are issued, as well as the Staff E-Zine, which will detail the resources available. Nick confirmed that there are specific support staff in place to address mental health concerns as well as strategy and policy where necessary.

60.6 Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, asked whether a monthly mental health temperature check could be implemented by way of an anonymous questionnaire. The Principal advised that occasional PULSE surveys have been undertaken. He advised that scheduling these once a month may be excessive and thereafter asked the Senior Vice-Principal for comment. The Senior Vice-Principal advised that a PULSE survey was undertaken during the height of the pandemic. He explained that he would not recommend committing to another at this stage as it is a considerable undertaking which requires significant resources. The Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that a regular staff survey is conducted every two years with the next one scheduled for November. He advised that its steering group will be set up next week to address the relevant issues with trade union representation. He emphasised the importance of engaging with line management, undertaking annual reviews, and utilising the Workload Toolkit as appropriate.

COURT REPORT

61.1 Neil Vargesson, Senate Assessor, gave a brief overview of the Court Report for Senators; he advised members that business was conducted at the Institute of Medical Sciences in Foresterhill, where an informative risk strategy workshop was held in the afternoon, prior to convening with Senior Governors of RGU and NESCOL at King’s Campus in the first of a series of meetings to discuss collaboration on pertinent issues. Neil thereafter welcomed any questions from Senators.

CHARTER FOR RESPONSIBLE DEBATE

62.1 The Senior Vice-Principal, gave a brief description of the recent work undertaken in relation to the adoption of the Charter for Responsible Debate. He advised that the matter had been considered carefully by members of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) and clarified that formal approval is being sought from Senate for the Charter’s adoption. The Principal asked if there were any reservations.

62.2 David Anderson, School of Social Science, advised that he held no reservations and felt that the provisions were quite strong, however, he stated that the Charter itself does not necessarily address threats to academic freedom and the potential “chilling effect” on debate. He advised that there is an association for the support of academic freedom at the University of Edinburgh which enables academics to host debates on contentious issues. He advised that the association is supported by a website which features regular blogs and a budget. David stressed the importance of proactively supporting debate and suggested investing in a similar approach for the University of Aberdeen. The Principal welcomed the idea and advised that he would be happy to receive a formal proposal for consideration by Senate at a later date.

62.3 Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, on behalf of his constituents, questioned whether the items addressing antisemitism and responsible debate should be considered together. The Principal advised that it is appropriate that they are dealt with separately as the matter on responsible debate is much broader.

62.4 Amy Bryzgel, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, stated that the wording of the document was rather vague in terms of avoiding any disrespectful or defamatory language. She expressed reservations that there was not enough being done to address the culture surrounding responsible debate and that policy alone is unlikely to achieve the desired
effect. The Principal acknowledged Amy’s concerns and advised that it would be better to adopt the Charter rather than to go without it. He explained that adopting the charter publicly should help to affect the overall culture surrounding responsible debate. Amy expressed that the policy should be underpinned by something more robust and should be of immediate consideration. The Principal advised that given that as there are no other proposals available for debate this is the only proposal that can be considered at present.

62.5 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, expressed his support for the Charter stating that it has already provided food for thought as well as a framework which can be referred to as necessary.

62.6 The Principal asked Senators if there were any objections. No objections were raised and the matter was approved.

DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

63.1 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, explained that the paper aims to set out the deliberations of the Race Definitions Task and Finish Group; and to articulate the consultation which has occurred since the matter was last presented to Senate during which the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition was debated. She informed members that the input of the Race Equality Network (REN), Race Equality Champions, and the Jewish Students Society have been instrumental in the process. The Vice-Principal Education re-iterated the various options available for addressing the issue and clarified that the recommendation is to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA). She advised Senators that whilst students continued to press for the adoption of the IHRA definition of Antisemitism, they were content to approve the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism by way of ensuring a visible commitment by the University to safeguard against antisemitism. The Vice-Principal Education advised members that consideration was given to the fact that there has not been another University to adopt the JDA, however, it was felt that this should not deter the institution as this is not inconsistent with the views of the Higher Education sector on antisemitism. The Principal summarised the process, as referred to earlier by the Vice-Principal Education, and then invited the views of Senators.

63.2 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, advised that some of his constituents were in favour of the IHRA definition given that many other Universities have already adopted it; and they felt it may resonate better with the Jewish communities living in Britain. Joachim shared that in his personal opinion the IHRA definition is still considered contentious by some as it is not universally accepted by the Jewish community in Britain. He also advised members that there were concerns raised in relation to the interpretation of the JDA; namely that criticisms of Israel could be seen as lapsing into antisemitism although this may be considered somewhat speculative. Joachim briefly suggested adopting both the IHRA and the JDA but stated that this may not be possible given that they do not complement each other. The Principal stated that unfortunately not everyone will be entirely content and stressed the importance of the consultation process that had taken place to reach a workable solution. He confirmed that the recommendation made to Senate is to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration of Antisemitism. The Principal thereafter asked if there were any reservations by Senators or if anything else should be taken into account.

63.3 Jonathan Pettit, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, stated that it was an issue of inclusion. He advised members that he had obtained feedback from graduate students stating that they felt more comfortable within the University given the consideration of the adoption of JDA. The Principal stated that this was encouraging and advised that this was the intended purpose of adopting such a definition.
63.4 Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, advised that as Race Champion she was involved in the consultation process and stated that the JDA does not address white supremacy which is where a large part of antisemitism originates. The Principal recognised that further steps may be required. Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, reassured members that there will be further discussion with the Jewish Students’ Society to explore the practical ways in which Jewish students can be supported to feel safe on campus. The Principal asked members whether they approved the recommendation. There were no objections and Senate thereafter approved the adoption of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. Senate noted that the matter would now be subject to further consideration at the next meeting of Court.

RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE (RPC)
PRESENTATION: RESEARCH CULTURE

64.1 Gary MacFarlane, Dean of Interdisciplinary Research and Research Impact, gave a presentation on research culture and the work of the Research Culture Task and Finish Group which reports to the Research Policy Committee. He explained the processes undertaken to assess the University’s research culture against the backdrop of Aberdeen 2040 strategy. The main tenets were as follows;

- A set of webpages were created on the University’s website to showcase the various initiatives helping to generate a positive research culture.
- Research culture describes the behaviours, values, expectations, norms and attitudes of a research community.
- Research culture impacts upon integrity, diversity, career paths, reward and recognition, open science and the ethos of collaboration.
- It is hoped that co-ordinated efforts with institutions across the UK will help to produce results that can then form benchmarks.
- When internal staff were asked to describe the University’s research culture it revealed that there were some negative perceptions which included siloed, disorganised, challenging and a lack of communication.
- Four main areas of priority were identified;
  1) to develop research careers
  2) to change how we do research
  3) to support inclusive and respective research environments.
  4) to improve the experience of working in research.
- A sample of the 22 recommendations highlighted by the task and finish group were as follows;
  1) to develop research careers by rewarding good research culture practices through promotion and recruitment processes; provide tailored support for mid-career researchers and more long-term support for early career researchers; support development and planning for diverse career paths.
  2) to change how we do research by building an infrastructure designed to support equitable and open research publishing, including the responsible use of metrics to measure the impact of open research, and raising awareness of reporting systems in terms of research misconduct.
  3) It was recommended that a wider set of research activities were recognised in the promotion procedure and that the overall importance of the volume of research published was decreased.
- It was recognised that in terms of implementation, research culture does not stand alone and is linked to other activities including equality and diversity as well as workload.

Gary MacFarlane informed Senators that the full report would be made available after the
meeting and that members could contact the TFG with their thoughts via e-mail at researchculture@abdn.ac.uk. The Principal then asked members for their thoughts and comments.

64.2 Amy Bryzgel, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, stated that the presentation did not mention gender or marginalised individuals. She explained that many of these groups are already at a disadvantage and have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. She stated that many of her constituents have been expressing their fears and anxieties surrounding this issue. Amy stressed the need for a specific recovery programme as there are those who have not been able to recover after losing their research during the pandemic.

64.3 David Anderson, School of Social Science, explained that research has been adversely affected due to the pressures associated with delivering teaching throughout the pandemic. He stated that it may take a number of years to regain the previous momentum and expressed his surprise that the TFG does not suggest a two or three year period of investment in order to rectify this. David suggested the inclusion of a second volume to the report which specifically addresses these concerns.

64.4 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, expressed her support for the implementation of a recovery plan. She stated this is particularly relevant for those that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to their familial responsibilities and travel restrictions. Alessandra advised that this has significantly impacted upon staff mental health, therefore individuals in these categories may require extra support in addition to the implementation of a long-term recovery plan.

64.5 Irene Couzgou, School of Law, advised members that visiting scholars are not routinely provided with an IT account which means they are unable to access the library. She explained that the only way round this is to provide them with Honorary Member of Staff status but that this may not be entirely appropriate for the nature of their engagement. Irene asked whether the TFG had considered improving this process.

64.6 Ralph O’Connor, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, echoed the sentiments that a specific recovery plan and accompanying discussions would be very helpful in addressing the current concerns. He advised members that some of the mid to high level discussions surrounding additional support have focused on certain categories of staff which may be perceived as generating unfairness, however, it would generate greater inequality if these individuals were not provided with the necessary support to alleviate the disproportionate effects of the pandemic. Ralph thereafter suggested improving the current web-design of the University staff profiles to better highlight the research undertaken and its overall impact. He stated the importance of distinguishing between various disciplines in terms of publications; he explained that scientific publications are often listed in chronological order without the ability to search for certain categories of publication; whereas, the gold standard for humanities traditionally involves listing the volume of books published on a particular subject. Ralph advised this would be a relatively simple solution to raise awareness of the research undertaken and reflect the webpages of similar institutions across the UK and Ireland.

64.7 Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, asked whether the data collected by individual institutes for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion purposes were used to inform the work of the Research Culture Task and Finish Group.

64.8 Murilo da Silva Baptista, School of Natural and Computing Sciences, stated that research has not only been affected by the pandemic but that it has been affected by other initiatives, such as the
implementation of January starts, which have been introduced as a way of generating revenue. He explained the importance of assessing the depth of impact upon individual research programmes when determining a recovery plan. Murilo emphasised that the recruitment of new students is not the only viable solution. The Principal clarified that whilst the generation of income to support research is not optional, he would be happy to consider other ways of generating revenue.

64.9 Gary MacFarlane explained that one of the challenges associated with the project was that it could involve too broad a focus therefore only research culture was selected. He advised members that he is currently leading another working group undertaking the Research Centre Review which has recommended that research is marketed and promoted in a more consistent way. Gary acknowledged the presence of several questions relating to issues of equality and diversity and reassured members that the report will address these issues in greater detail including detailing specific recommendations. He added that this will also include recommendations for those returning to research after taking a career break. He stressed that members should contact the group if any further questions arise.

64.10 The Principal suggested the inclusion of an additional chapter within the report detailing how colleagues will be aided in their recovery instead of a supplementary report. He then asked the Senior Vice-Principal to comment on how the promotion process considers the impact of the pandemic on staff.

64.11 The Senior Vice-Principal clarified that the current promotion procedures invite applicants to detail how they have been affected by the pandemic and the effect it has had on their research projects. He advised that the work undertaken into research culture will inform how these procedures are approached in future.

RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE (RPC)
RPC REPORT TO SENATE

65.1 The Principal advised members that Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal Research, was unable to attend and speak to the report due to her engagement the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results. He clarified that the report was for information only and asked that any non-urgent questions were addressed to Marion via e-mail.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
ACADEMIC YEAR 2022/23

66.1 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, gave a brief overview of the papers contained within item 8.1. She clarified that approval is being sought in relation to the recommended Principals to support the delivery of education; and the proposed adjustments to the structure of the 13-week teaching and delivery model to allow for examinations where these are required. The Principal thereafter asked Senators for comment.

66.2 Ekaterina Pavlovskaya, School of Engineering, stated that she had no specific comments on the structure of the 22-23 academic year and welcomed the 11 plus two model as it allows the School to accommodate examinations. She thereafter advised that the ability to accommodate exams during the 23-24 academic year is limited according to the current proposal. She requested a return to the model of 14 weeks of each half-session encompassing 11 weeks of teaching, one week of revision and two weeks of exams. Ruth confirmed that the 23-24 schedule will be revisited at a later point.
Scott Styles, School of Law, stated that he was concerned that there is not enough time to accommodate marking requirements. He suggested pushing back the graduations by a week or so to better accommodate marking. Ruth advised that marking commitments, particularly in terms of the delivery of feedback, have been considered in full but it would be possible to consider the timings in relation to the 23-24 discussion.

Neil Vargesson, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, asked how these arrangements apply to January starts. He explained that the length of the proposed half-sessions appears to differ for these students. Ruth stated that there should be an equal 13 weeks in terms of the agreed schedule and to return to her if there are any problems.

Richard Hepworth, School of Natural and Computing Science, asked whether consideration was given to accommodating students with extra time in terms of the second paper; and whether the infrastructure of a full exam diet will be made available i.e. central organisation of rooms. Ruth confirmed that this was factored in.

Joanne Anderson, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, stated that she remains concerned about the ‘orphan’ week in second half-session and the implications for teaching. Ruth advised that would be happy to consider matters further but that the proposals have been designed to meet the needs of both teaching and assessment. It was agreed that Joanne would consult further with Ruth after the meeting.

The Principal asked members if they were content to proceed. There were no objections raised and the matter was approved.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
DEGREE CLASSIFICATIONS AND AWARDING GAPS

Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, advised members that the paper was provided to Senate for information and discussion purposes. She provided a brief summary of the report and welcomed suggestions in terms of solutions or next steps. Ruth stated that whilst there has been a rise in the proportion of first-class honours, the statistics are reasonably comparable to the sector (the Russell Group is the comparator). She advised that there is a correlation between entry tariff and the proportion of good honours awarded and noted that the University of Aberdeen is ranked 8th for entry standards and 14th for good honours in the UK according to The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide. Ruth explained that moving towards the use of GPA will likely reduce the proportion of first-class degrees. She advised that the awarding gap for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority students was 7.6% in 2021; the awarding gap for mature students was 10% and the population of widening access students (SMID20) is recorded as having a 10% awarding gap in 2021. Ruth stated that suitable actions will be identified in addition to current practices to specifically address these gaps and any contributing factors. She stated that Schools would have access to the Power BI dashboard in order to achieve this.

Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, explained that student feedback reveals that some international students have struggled to demonstrate their knowledge via the designated assessment methods due to a lack of experience. She requested greater action orientated tasks designed to enhance necessary skills, such as essay writing and critical analysis, to improve their overall performance. Aravinda stated that her School’s pilot programmes, aimed at developing essay writing skills, were considered very helpful by students.

Ivana Drdakova, AUSA Vice-President for Welfare, stated that whilst the figures are deeply troubling, it is good to see that it is being recognised. She asked whether extra funding will be made available for vulnerable groups who may be disproportionately affected by economic...
stressors and may be unable to study due to work obligations. The Principal advised that
widening access students currently receive free accommodation during their first year. He added
that there has been some reflection on whether scholarships could be provided throughout their
studies and whether that might be considered more desirable. Ruth acknowledged the concerns
and emphasised the need to discuss these issues with the students themselves.

67.4 Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, stated that the gap in mature
students was noted by his constituents and that there is little visual representation of mature
students across the University’s platforms, e.g. social media, webpages, and he suggested
correcting this. Tom stated that there appears to be lower overall numbers of mature students;
and the stream of students associated with access courses no longer appears to be visible. He
suggested renewed support for the initiative as it helps mature students to return to their studies
at a later date. Ruth Taylor acknowledged the concerns and advised that she was happy to
explore the matter further.

67.5 Alison Jenkinson, Dean for Widening Access, Articulation and Outreach, advised members that
the definition of a mature student is anyone over the age of 21. She informed Senators that work
is underway to build a comprehensive catalogue of access courses which will be made available
to mature students and those from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority backgrounds.

67.6 Scott Styles, School of Law, asked whether summer schools are still in operation. Alison Jenkinson
confirmed that they were still running and added that transition programmes operated
throughout the pandemic to support widening access students. She informed Senators that the
courses have now been made available to all students in response to the challenges associated
with the pandemic. Alison advised Senators that there are discipline and academic skills courses
that enhance transition and there is work underway to determine how these programmes link
with orientation. Scott Styles suggested improving communications and advertising in order to
raise awareness of these courses. Alison explained that the communications are being directed
towards prospective students and not necessarily staff. Scott explained the importance of
targeting the public via radio and/or billboards to increase awareness of the various initiatives
available for further study. Scott enquired as to the representation of students from working
class and potentially socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The Principal directed Scott to the data
contained within the report.

67.7 Colin North, School of Geosciences, suggested increasing awareness of the Student Learning
Service which provides support for generic skills, such as how to write essays, as there have been
a number of students and staff that were unaware of this particular resource. Ruth advised that
she was happy to take the matter away for further consideration. Ruth clarified that the papers
will be used to develop a suitable action plan which will return to Senate for further discussion
at a later date.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT TO SENATE

68.1 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, advised members that there were a number of items
within the report for routine approval. She explained that the changes in regulations, such as the
Omnibus Resolution, are seeking approval and that some of the matters under section 4 will be
brought back to Senate along with the accompanying papers. The Principal asked Senators for
their comments.

68.2 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, explained that there is
frustration amongst colleagues in relation to the penalties for plagiarism not being imposed as
expected, particularly given the significant amount of preparatory work that is often undertaken.
She therefore suggested making the clause that states that the investigating officer can overrule due to other mitigating circumstances more prominent.

68.3 Alison Jenkinson, Disciplinary Investigating Officer, advised Senators that the use of the aforementioned clause is essential in maintaining consistency throughout the University in terms of extenuating circumstances. She further clarified that there may be circumstances where it is appropriate to impose a lower penalty.

68.4 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, advised that it is important to encourage students to raise issues at the time so that they can deal with the mitigating circumstances appropriately and help avoid students getting into further difficulties and potentially engaging in academic misconduct e.g. contract cheating.

68.5 Dragan Jovicic, School Engineering, advised that the penalties for research misconduct are too harsh given the ever-changing requirements for preservation of data. He suggested inserting ‘serious inadequacy’ into the clause governing the preservation of data to allow for this. He also suggested explicitly stating that this would not include the simple loss of data or honest lack of data preservation skills. Ruth agreed to take this forward for further consideration.

68.6 The Principal thereafter asked members of Senate if they approved the amendments contained within the paper. There were no objections, and the matter was approved.

UPDATE FROM THE WORKLOAD REVIEW GROUP ON THE ACADEMIC WORKLOAD MODEL

69.1 The Senior Vice-Principal gave members an update on the work undertaken by the Workload Review Group on the Academic Workload Model. He explained that there are two dimensions to the workload review concerning both general and academic workloads. He advised members that the paper focuses on the latter and includes a revised model detailing the various activities undertaken in relation to research, teaching, and administration. The Senior Vice-Principal recognised that there will be a pilot scheme with regards to the practical application of the proposal. He explained that there have also been conversations in relation to ensuring academic staff receive appropriate recognition for their achievements and allocating enough time to meet these expectations. The Senior Vice-Principal advised that further consultation would help to determine whether the recommendations are on track and provide a thorough sense-check.

69.2 Ralph O’Connor, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, stated that it was a positive document, and he was glad to hear that the group is defining various activities. He suggested that the definition of Scholarship requires further consideration as there is often a lack of consensus within UK institutions; thereafter he asked whether colleagues on teaching and scholarship contracts had been consulted on the issue. Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, advised that the Directors of Education have been consulted on the matter and that further consultation is planned with colleagues on teaching and scholarship contracts.

69.3 David Anderson, School of Social Science, agreed that it was a positive document but suggested some of the principles were still quite vague and perhaps needed to be further defined. He stated that transparency could be better represented within the context of the paper, and that there were some inequities with regards to recording contact time. He recommended the use of a universal set of metrics to address these inequities. He also suggested that the Heads of School may benefit from a more transparent, granular dataset in relation to workloads. The Principal agreed that workload allocations should be completely transparent. The Senior Vice-Principal explained that best practice in terms of the sector, suggests that workload is transparent and
Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, stated that the notional figure of 1650 hours are often very flexible and therefore not necessarily transparent. He advised that this may not give confidence to the idea of equity of workload. The Senior Vice-Principal agreed that it was important to “truth-ground” conversations surrounding the workload model and advised members that this will be considered as part of a rigorous review of the actual workload of each staff member at the end of the academic year. He stated that there is an awareness from the staff survey of staff working for longer than the agreed notional hours and this needs to be addressed in a fair and transparent manner. The Senior Vice-Principal stressed the importance of a realistic and credible approach.

Dragan Jovcic, School Engineering, advised members that consideration should be given to externally bought-out time as this could be interpreted differently i.e. top-sliced. Dragan noted that Heads of School oversee matters in terms of large grants. The Senior Vice-Principal advised that how large grants should be treated was subject to further discussion by the workload review group and the model needed to incentivise staff to secure such grants.

Iain McEwan, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, asked whether activities such as sitting on grant panels or government review panels should be considered under the umbrella of citizenship. The Senior Vice-Principal explained that those elements are included under research and research culture. He explained that citizenship encompasses activities outwith research and advised that the matter will be further clarified.

Nir Oren, School of Natural and Computing Sciences, reminded members that academic workloads are often dynamic and reactive; for example, there may be last minute changes due to the awarding of large grants. Nir suggested a buffer to allow for greater flexibility. He also advised members that Schools may have very different norms in terms of supervision.

Amy Bryzgel, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, stated that the workload continues to be added in the form of additional paperwork and January starts but nothing appears to be being removed. She advised that independent court members are wondering about the impacts and pressures associated with greater January intake. The Senior Vice-Principal advised that the Toolkit suggests cutting down assessment load and encourages schools to address their internal pressures and adjust their work accordingly. He noted that there are often competing priorities and resources are finite. He informed members that the matter will return to Senate in September.

OUTCOMES FROM THE SENATE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

REVISIONS TO SENATE STANDING ORDERS

The Secretary gave a brief overview of the paper presented to Senate. She advised members that the paper contained a comparison of the current standing orders with the proposed amendments. She stated that the changes were made with a view to increasing accessibility. The Secretary confirmed that the paper is seeking approval and welcomed questions.

Colin North, School of Geosciences, raised the matter of Senate recordings and origin of items. Colin requested that item 6 of the current standing orders is reinstated to ensure the origin of items is identified. The Secretary advised that she was happy to reinstate the clause. He advised members that the new standing orders no longer clarifies how recordings will be stored and for how long; in particular, item 9c of the previous standing orders, stipulating that Senate will be audio-recorded and placed on the website, has been omitted. Colin stated that prior to the
pandemic all meetings were audio recorded and the link to those recordings was made available to Senators so that they could check the minute. He explained that he had an implicit understanding that the recording would be deleted upon approval of the minutes at the next Senate. The Secretary clarified that the current meeting is operating under the current standing orders. She advised members that the meetings are recorded to assist with the administrative process of constructing the minute. She stated that a privacy notice would be required if the recordings were to be shared on the University’s website. She advised that it may not be an effective use of Senators’ time to assess the minute in a line-by-line fashion. The Principal agreed that this approach may not be in the interests of achieving a healthy work-life balance.

70.3 Amy Bryzgel, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, raised concerns in relation to voting by consensus and stated that she felt uncomfortable with the procedure. She questioned whether an accurate assessment can be reached and whether it was an appropriate approach. The Principal explained that, as Chair, it is his responsibility to read the room and questioned whether it would be a good use of time to implement individual voting for every single item. Amy stated that individual voting provides transparency. The Principal explained it is important to strike a balance between time and workload. The Secretary clarified that the existing standing orders allow for voting both by consent and active voting.

70.4 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, expressed her support for the use of audio recordings as it provides an opportunity for any queries to be addressed. Diane questioned the consistency of the approach to recording Senate meetings via MS Teams. The Secretary advised that the digital recording of Senate meetings via MS Teams was agreed in response to the pandemic and this may no longer be considered appropriate. The Secretary advised that she was happy to stand down the MS teams recording given the circumstances.

70.5 Gareth Jones, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, echoed Amy’s sentiments, particularly in the absence of recordings, and stated that voting is not very time-consuming. The Principal advised that it is up to Senate to decide how to use its time and stated that it was reasonable for the Chair to check whether a vote is necessary.

70.6 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, thanked the Secretary for advising members that Senate was operating in accordance with the current standing orders. He suggested explicitly stating within the standing orders, that individual voting should be used instead of consensus when controversial topics are being considered. The Principal supported this and reassured members that he would do his best to detect significant disagreement.

70.7 Zeray Yihdego, School of Law, stated that it is not always necessary to vote on matters and that the Chair and Senators are capable of requesting a vote when necessary. The Principal confirmed he is duty bound to comply if a Senator requests a vote.

70.8 Iain McEwan, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, stated that he believed the recording was for administrative purposes only and reminded members of the debate in relation to transcription. He expressed to Senators that he appreciated the ability to vote individually under the Chair’s guidance and stressed that it was an important aspect of Senate.

70.9 David Anderson, School of Social Science, expressed concern that the ability to “read the room” may fail in the context of hybrid meetings and drew members attention to the apparent disagreement in the online chat. He also stated that members may not feel comfortable asking for a vote and there may be a chilling effect. David explained that the audio recording is reassuring in terms of minuting and advised that Senate made the decision to initiate recordings therefore Senate should decide to eliminate access to the recordings. He explained that there is
a broader need to discuss the changes to the current standing orders and stated that the standing orders are a constitution. He expressed concerns that two specific comments made in relation to the proposed changes have not been addressed and the need to consider the right to objection. He therefore requested that Senate Business Committee considered the proposal again with feedback from Senators before returning the Standing Orders to Senate. The Principal accepted the proposal made by David and asked the Senior Vice-Principal, as Chair of Senate Business Committee, to confirm the action. The Senior Vice-Principal agreed to this temporary expansion of the remit of Senate Business Committee.

OUTCOMES FROM THE SENATE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW
REVISED EDUCATION COMMITTEE REMITS & COMPOSITIONS

71.1 The Secretary drew the attention of members to a number of important changes with regards to the remits and compositions of the University Education Committee (UEC) and the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), arising in part from the move of both Committees to reporting solely to Senate. She explained that there would be a change of membership and that Senate would be responsible for their effectiveness. The Secretary advised that the paper also outlines the various sub-committees.

71.2 Richard Hepworth, School of Natural and Computing Sciences, stated that one of the original reasons for including Senators in the membership of the University Education Committee (UEC) was to ensure that there was a staff voice present. He stated that it may be difficult for the Directors of Education to represent the views of staff in this capacity and proposed that UEC membership continues to be composed of elected Senators. The Secretary expressed concerns regarding the ability to clearly articulate the intended representation of Senate views in toto. She advised that it would not be unreasonable to expect the Directors of Education to have an understanding of the issues and concerns of staff within their respective Schools. Ruth Taylor, Vice Principal Education, explained that School leads are required, as part of their role on the committees, to raise awareness of the work undertaken by these committees and to consult with staff in terms of providing feedback. Richard explained that the current consultation process within his School is convoluted and does not involve direct consultation with the Directors of Education.

71.3 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, agreed with the need for Senate representation and a bottom-up approach. She explained that the thoughts and opinions of colleagues are represented by the views of constituents. She emphasised that Senators are often good at sharing information and discussing important matters with their fellow colleagues.

71.4 David Anderson, School of Social Science, stated that it was previously recommended that Senate should be more involved in the work of other committees, therefore, it seems counter-intuitive to remove their membership. David urged further co-ordination with Senators to avoid the committees becoming echo-chambers for the views of senior management. He argued that Senators provide valuable insight to the decision-making process.

71.5 The Senior Vice-Principal agreed that the Senate Effectiveness Review called for greater coherence with regards to the integration of sub-committees and Senate; and stressed that the restructuring of committees has helped to address this. The Senior Vice-Principal recalled that Senators were highly effective at representing the views of communities from Foresterhill and Old Aberdeen with regards to Campus Planning. He suggested that given the significant journey of trust to be undertaken, it may be feasible for an interim approach which would allow for the membership of two elected Senators within UEC for a period of time, and subject to review.

71.6 The Secretary advised that the move could be considered bad governance due to concerns
regarding circularity: it is not good practise for members of the main committee to appoint representatives of the parent committee to its sub-committees. She advised that a temporary measure could be considered whilst the necessary relationships and trust is built. The Secretary acknowledged that this would involve a change in the reporting structure meantime. Richard thereafter clarified he was not proposing a vote on the matter.

71.7 Colin North, School of Geosciences, raised the same concerns regarding the membership of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). The Secretary advised that whilst it is a matter for Senate to decide, UEC focuses on policy and strategy, whereas, QAC draws upon Quality Assurance expertise therefore it is more difficult to achieve Senate representation. The Principal welcomed any further representations and thereafter deemed it appropriate to implement the same temporary measure for QAC, as agreed upon for UEC, in terms of including Senate representation.

71.8 Colin North, School of Geosciences, stated that a number of his constituents felt that in order to achieve true independence the chairs of both committees must be different. He motioned that the Chair of the University Education Committee cannot be the same as the Chair of Quality Assurance Committee. Colin thereafter clarified that there is a conflict of interest given that the role of Chair involves an element of soft power which may allow for the business to be manipulated. He stated the importance of creating robust procedures for the future.

71.9 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education, stated that the Education portfolio necessitates engagement with both committees in a leadership role. She stated that the committee reporting structure has changed significantly and the conflict of interest is removed given the direct oversight of both Committees by Senate. She explained to members that her perception of the role of Chair is to facilitate discussion and decision making rather than to manipulate the business. She also clarified that her role does not infringe upon the duties that were previously associated with the role of Dean for Quality Assurance which involved the development of policy and regulations. Ruth explained that there have been significant changes within Academic Services and a Head of Quality will be appointed. The Secretary advised that there is not a conflict of interest due to the different nature of the committees but reminded members that a significant cross-over in membership should be avoided. She also informed members that there are a number of Scottish Universities who operate with their Vice-Principals (Education) as Chair of both committees.

71.10 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, advised that he was once a member of QAC and it had been considered very independent. He stated that the current arrangement is a great improvement.

71.11 Colin North, School of Geosciences, requested a vote on the matter to determine whether there should be different Chairs of QAC and UEC. Voting was conducted both online and in the chamber.

The results of the vote:
34 in favour
29 against
1 abstention

71.12 Colin North, School of Geosciences, advised members that he had proposed a second amendment stating that the Chair of QAC should be a member of academic staff and not a person from professional or support staff. He asked whether the matter could be considered at the next sitting, alongside any recommendations, due to the results of the vote and the time constraints. The Principal agreed. Senate were not asked to approve the amended proposal.
ANY OTHER BUSINESS

72.1 [None]

SENATE ELECTIONS

73.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved the timeline for election of school representatives to the Senate (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

DEANS:
RECONFIGURATION OF ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ABERDEEN 2040

74.1 Senate noted the proposed job descriptions. Members were encouraged to share the opportunity to apply for the roles of Dean for Enterprise & Innovation and Dean for Environmental Sustainability with their constituents.