UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2020


APPROVAL OF AGENDA

46.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the first ever Senate meeting by Microsoft Teams. The Principal noted that it was unlikely to be the last in this format, as the current circumstances were expected to continue for some time. The Principal extended his thanks to all members of the Senate for the huge amount of work that has been undertaken to date to continue to educate the University’s students, to continue to assess them remotely and to prepare for a blended learning approach in the autumn. He further noted the research activity that is ongoing on Covid-19 and in other areas. The Principal stated that the University community was continuing to be true to its foundational purpose, by continuing to educate, continuing to undertake research and continuing to pursue truth in the service of others. He noted the positive impact of being able to rise to the challenges affecting the whole world at this time.

46.2 The attention of members was drawn to the fact that the meeting would be recorded. Members were asked to use the chat function to state when they wished to ask a question and to remain muted when not speaking. With regards voting, the clerk updated members on the process for voting, should this be required.
46.3 The Principal invited members to approve the agenda. He noted that no items for routine approval or information had been brought forward for discussion. Members of the Senate approved the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF 5 FEBRUARY 2020

47.1 The Principal invited members of the Senate to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2020. No comments or objections were raised, and the meeting proceeded.

UPDATE FROM PRINCIPAL

48.1 The Principal, in providing an update to the Senate, began by noting that different countries were in effect conducting a quasi-experiment on easing lockdown. He stated that the obligations of the University were to pay very close attention to the position adopted by the Scottish Government. He noted that there would come a time when lockdown measures in Scotland were eased and consideration would be given to what that means for the University’s activities on campus. For now, he confirmed, that the University would continue to be in step with the position of the Scottish Government. The Principal also provided an update on the University’s financial position and the projected shortfall for the next year. He emphasised that the projected shortfall reflected the position the University would be in if all the right steps, such as restraining expenditure and recruiting students through blended learning and January starts, were taken. He stated this shortfall in income at approximately £39 million. He encouraged members of the Senate to do all that could be done to ensure a worse position was not reached and that as safe a position as possible could be achieved in 2020/21. He stated his optimism that the University could recover beyond 2020/21.

COVID-19 - BRIEFING PAPER

49.1 The Principal moved to discuss the Covid-19 Briefing Paper. He acknowledged that the paper covered a lot of ground and highlighted the areas of teaching and research as those of particular importance to the Senate and their role in ensuring the quality and integrity of both.

49.2 Marion Campbell, Vice Principal (Research), introduced the sections on the paper regarding research activity. She echoed the sentiments of the Principal in thanking the community for ensuring that research remains an active part of academic life during this period of disruption. Marion stated that, from a research perspective, the key message in the paper was that the full central support team remains fully active and available to provide support to research activities. Staff should be encouraged to actively continue and nurture their research activities. She stated that a benefit of continuing to apply for research grants at this point in time is that it will provide a steady stream of income in an environment of volatility surrounding what may or may not happen with student numbers. Marion noted that examples of this included the Scottish Government million-pound award in Covid-19 research, and an anticipated research orientated award from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as part of their 75 million-pound package to the Scottish sector. She reiterated the importance of staff considering and promoting their research applications going forward.

49.3 Marion updated members of the Senate on another major development, with regards to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). She noted that a new submission date of 31 March 2021 had been proposed by the national REF executive. She informed the Senate that a University response to the consultation of this date had been submitted, suggesting that a later submission date would be better, to enable a more holistic response to, and mitigation
of, issues raised by Covid-19. Marion noted, however, that it was anticipated that the 31 March would be accepted, primarily as a consequence of Russell Group support for this date. She informed the Senate that work towards this date would begin and that discussions were underway with the unit of assessment leads as to what that means for delivery.

49.4 Looking ahead to the lifting of lockdown, Marion informed the Senate that planning was underway to inform the safe return of research that must happen on campus, for example, lab-based research and campus-based research. She noted that major planning is required to get research of this nature activated again. Members of the Senate were informed that once plans on this were further developed, they would be communicated as widely as possible. Marion stated that it was expected that a return to research of this nature was expected to be very controlled and, initially, by way of a phased approach. Finally, Marion noted the need for forbearance and patience by the research community as these steps are taken.

49.5 Ruth Taylor, Vice Principal (Education), introduced the sections on the paper regarding teaching and learning activity. Ruth also reiterated her thanks to colleagues for the incredible amount of work taken forward and delivered on, in order to do what was needed for the University’s current students. Ruth noted that assessment was ongoing, and that it appeared to be going well. Ruth reminded members of the Senate that an all staff Teams session had been held on Monday 11 May regarding Blended Learning and stated that this session provided some more detail than that provided in the paper. The presentation included information on the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG). Members of the Senate were informed that the presentation given by Ruth was now available online for them to view. Ruth also noted that some useful comments and questions had been posed at the meeting, answers to which would be collated and be made available online. Members of the Senate noted the scenarios which had been agreed at University level for planning. Ruth stated that there had been questions about which scenarios were being planned for, confirming that these were scenarios 1 and 2 as follows:

**Scenario 1:** This assumes that mobility and travel restrictions are starting to be lifted and that there is a possibility that Scottish and rUK students could attend campus at the start of term or join us when they can. International students would join us when they can, with reduced September entry and increased numbers in January. Return to campus is likely to be characterised by continued physical distancing. The scenario also assumes that there might be a second lockdown in autumn.

**Scenario 2:** This assumes that the pandemic continues and that universities are not able to move back on-campus until January 2021, and that no on-campus delivery is possible in autumn 2020. Students would be taught solely online until Christmas and would transition to campus delivery in early 2021. International recruitment would be significantly impacted for both online and on-campus delivery.

Ruth confirmed that work was continuing in regard to the planning against these scenarios, supported by the work of the Campus Planning Group. Members of the Senate noted that meetings with each School had been held, focussed on ensuring Schools were able to take decisions in relation to scope, scale and the timescales associated with the delivery of blended learning for academic year 20/21. Ruth emphasised the importance of the University being as prepared as we possibly can be for the start of the academic year, whilst also understanding the challenges that the work brings. Ruth updated the Senate on the mechanisms being put in place to support the work on Blended Learning, including a model of support from colleagues in the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), project management, and other general and specialist support which aims to support each School with the planning and implementation of blended learning. She noted that this support would be kept under review, and further support could be made available if necessary. Ruth informed the Senate that Kirsty
Kiezebrink and colleagues were in the final stages of completing the guidance and principles for the delivery of blended learning which would be made available to staff in the next two weeks. Finally, she noted that further work around communications would also follow, focused on collaboration, consultation, and dissemination of the BLITFG activities for staff, students, with other partners and groups as appropriate.

49.6 Ruth provided members of the Senate with an update on the agreed changes to the academic year. With reference to the paper circulated to members, she noted that the decision had been taken to delay the start of term by two weeks, to allow new and returning students the best possible chance of joining the University at the beginning of the first half session and also to enable as much preparation as possible for the start of academic year 20/21. Ruth acknowledged that there were known issues with School pupils and even the University’s own students who may not have been able to engage as much as they might have in normal circumstances, so the decision had been taken to provide new and existing students with as much time as possible in order to prepare for the first half session. Ruth emphasised to members of the Senate that there had been no change to the start of the second half session so as to allow the University to get back on track. She noted that the Registry deadline for the return of marks in the first half session had been extended by one week for students at levels three, four and five, and for two weeks for students at levels one and two. Members of the Senate noted that there had been a change to the deadline for students to choose their second half session courses but were reminded of the importance of ensuring that students had received their first half session results in advance of this. Ruth emphasised the importance of ensuring that the student experience with respect to the choice of courses was not affected by the changes to the academic year. In terms of consultation, members of the Senate were informed of the engagement of the Student Recruitment Planning Group and the Coronavirus Learning and Teaching group, on which all Schools are represented, in the proposal. With regards to the detailed structure of the change itself, the Senate were advised that consultation had been undertaken with Heads of School, School Administration Managers and the Students’ Association before approval was granted by the UCTL and the Senate. In responding to questions regarding the decision not to delay the start of the second half session, Ruth stated that this was for a variety of reasons including scheduling issues, the impact on graduation, the impact on future assessment and the potential impact on things like Easter based field trips and time for research later on in the year. She noted that the aim had been, as far as possible, to keep things on track for the coming year. Ruth acknowledged that there was a lot going on for staff with regard to workload, noting the importance of planning beginning now for academic year 20/21, with appropriate support in place to help mitigate the impact. Ruth suggested that Schools may wish to give consideration to the opportunity to free some time by temporarily not running some courses. In summary, Ruth reiterated the importance of a focus on the student experience.

49.7 Following the conclusion of Marion and Ruth’s presentations to the Senate, a discussion ensued. The main tenets of discussion were as follows:

- David Anderson, on behalf of the School of Social Science, asked a question regarding the history and purpose of the BLITFG. David noted that Senate authority had been devolved to the Vice-Principal (Education) and that Senate was obliged to receive an update on the
decisions taken under these powers. He noted that a report providing an update was very short, stating only three decisions had been taken, and provided only at the end of the papers. David stated that feeling amongst members of the Senate was that more decisions than those listed had been taken. As evidence of that, David stated that he had been through the minutes of the BLITFG which contained references to meetings of the Coronavirus Learning and Teaching Group and actions taken by this group. He stated that this appeared to be another set of activities which were ongoing and for which Senate should have an overview of these and a full report to this effect.

- Responding, Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, confirmed that the decision with regard to term dates was taken by a full vote of the Senate and not under emergency powers.
- Also responding, Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education) stated that the Coronavirus Learning and Teaching Group began meeting as soon as the community began to move into these extraordinary circumstances, in much the same way as there was an Institutional Coronavirus Group. She informed the Senate that the group was not a formal committee. Ruth reassured members that the only decisions which required Senate approval, taken under devolved powers, were those as listed in the report regarding assessment. She noted that a great deal of work was undertaken by the Coronavirus Learning and Teaching group, to mobilise colleagues to undertake necessary actions regarding issues such as moving to an off-campus teaching model and to enable teaching staff to work at home and the development of the materials they required to do so.

- In responding to another question from David Anderson, Karl provided an update to the Senate on campus access. He noted that within the next 24-48 hours, some principles, developed by the Campus Planning Group would be published to the University community for consultation. Karl stated that these would be regarding how the return to campus could be managed and would seek to address this issue. He acknowledged that access to campus was an issue that had been raised and that many members of staff would like to return to campus to collect materials. Karl reiterated that Scotland was currently in a period of lockdown where Scottish Government advice remained to stay at home. It was, he noted, therefore out of the question for anyone to come on to campus who was not authorised to do so as a key worker. He acknowledged that some members of staff did require access to IT equipment and that some had been sent to those with existing required adjustments. He informed the Senate that a call for those without pre-existing requirements would follow. Karl stated that a later stage would be to identify whether access can be gained to allow materials, such as those in relation to the preparation of teaching to be sent out. Karl emphasised that these steps would require a change in Government advice and a risk assessment to be carried out. He reiterated that it was not possible for staff to come onto campus in the meantime but that discussions would be undertaken with Heads of School regarding materials that may need to be purchased in the interim as a consequence of a lack of access.
- David Anderson stated that books, sets of data and/or teaching materials were all required to enable preparations for blended learning. He stated that access to campus was permitted to have IT equipment fixed and emphasised the importance of a similar approach for obtaining teaching materials.
- Responding, Karl stated that the feedback had been noted and that further feedback would be obtained by way of the consultation exercise to be undertaken within the next few days.
- Alfred Akisanya, representing the School of Engineering, asked a question with regards to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) £75 million package to the Scottish sector. Acknowledging that this was to be divided amongst all Scottish universities, he asked if the University was aware of how much it would receive and if there were any plans as to
how it would be spent. He noted PhD research students forced to extend their periods of study as an area of importance in such considerations.

- Responding, Marion Campbell, Vice Principal (Research) stated that it was not yet known how much the University would receive and that the SFC would provide further advice on this and on how the money should be spent. Regarding PhD students, Marion reassured Alfred and Senate that she was very aware of this issue and that it was likely that a small proportion of the money awarded might be available for this but that this would be clarified to the community as soon as guidance was available.

- Amy Bryzgel, on behalf of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, expressed some concern with staff being asked to continue to seek to undertake research when many members of staff, with caring responsibilities, were only just able to continue their teaching and undertake their day to day responsibilities. She noted that Humanities funding was very difficult to obtain, with approximately only a 10% success rate in applications and considerable restrictions in terms of how it can be spent. Amy further noted that the summer would be very teaching heavy and with staff also balancing other responsibilities such as caring. Amy stated that she understood that members of the Athena Swan team had been furloughed and that, as a consequence, the monitoring is not in place to identify who these issues are affecting. She further expressed concern as to how these circumstances could affect staff in the future regarding promotions, also noting that promotions are paused for the time being.

- Responding, Marion acknowledged the points raised and stated the importance of the ‘where possible’ message in encouraging staff to undertake research activity during the impact of Covid-19. She stated that it wouldn’t be possible for everyone to engage with research at this time and that issues, such as caring responsibilities, had been highlighted by the University in its response requesting a further delay to the REF submission deadline. Marion informed the Senate that a group was being set up to look at research culture across the University to explore issues such as those raised. Marion proposed that she and Amy discuss out with Senate ways to support those undertaking research in the Humanities.

- The Principal acknowledged the questions posed by Amy and stated the importance of remembering, alongside the challenges associated with the impact of Covid-19, the University’s 2040 strategy and the 20 commitments associated with it. He stated that these were for the community as a whole to be mindful of and in particular, of the one concerning equality.

- Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, raised a question regarding the appointment of new staff to advertised positions and, in particular, those who were international and required a visa to do so. He acknowledged that some visa offices had been closed during the pandemic and sought clarity as to whether if they had been held up by a lack of visa, through no fault of their own, that there was a risk the would miss the REF census deadline of 31 July.

- Responding, Karl confirmed that these individuals would be employed and on time. He noted that the UK Government was showing flexibility with regards to visa arrangements. Karl committed to check if there were any specific cases of concern, but that Heads of School had not raised with him any serious risks.

- Justin Rochford, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, asked whether the Scottish Government were permitting the opening of labs for non-Covid-19 research at this time or whether the easing of further restrictions would be required.

- Responding, Marion confirmed that despite a couple of minor exceptions, only Covid-19 labs were open. She confirmed that a prioritisation of research activity would be undertaken to allow for them to be phased in opening when permitted.
• Helen Martin, on behalf of the School of Education, asked a question regarding what could realistically be expected of staff working off campus and without materials in the preparation of teaching and/or research. Helen stated the need for transparency, particularly as staff were reporting under considerable amount of pressure. She noted the Union proposal for a survey to gauge the scale of the problem.
• Responding, the Principal acknowledged the importance of the points raised and stated that they had been discussed amongst the Senior Management Team (SMT) regularly. He noted that it would be helpful to receive data on the extent to which staff are experiencing these difficulties. Karl also acknowledged the points raised and noted that while a survey would not be undertaken, staff were to be written to and being asked to come forward with any pressures they were experiencing and with regards to their individual circumstances. Karl further informed the Senate that steps were being taken to reduce workload, where possible, and that communications regarding this would follow to the University community. Karl encouraged conversations between staff and their line managers regarding workload and individual circumstances. He accepted and recognised the major issue associated with workload, across Schools and the Professional Services.
• With regards to Blended Learning, David Anderson asked regarding the definition of Blended Learning and whether Senate would be asked to contribute to or define the concept of Blended Learning.
• Responding, Ruth acknowledged that Blended Learning can have different definitions and that there is a lot in the pedagogical literature about it. She noted that the University was interpreting it in a very practical way and in ensuring that the learning requirements are in place for all students in the context of Covid-19 and in recognition of the fact that students will not be able to return to campus in the same way that would have been anticipated under normal circumstances. For the University, Ruth confirmed, this was defined as having all provision online in recognition of the fact that students would not all return to campus in September but with the opportunity for students to transition to a form of campus-based experience when this is possible. With regards communication, Ruth confirmed that a strategy was in development about collaboration, consultation and dissemination. She stated her intention to consult on the approach to be taken.

COVID-19 – RISK REGISTER

50.1 The Principal introduced members of the Senate to the Covid-19 Risk Register and invited a question from David Anderson, on behalf of the School of Social Science, on it. David noted that while Heads of School are stating that individuals are being offered the opportunity to raise their individual circumstances, such as caring responsibilities with them, and discuss workloads with them. He noted concern, however, regarding requests to accommodate change not accommodated and how such issues can be known, if a survey of all staff in regard to the issues they are experiencing is not undertaken. He stated that a survey would inform the risk register in a more appropriate way. Responding, Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, confirmed that Heads of School were working with staff regarding their individual circumstances. He noted, however, that as the staff survey would not be undertaken in the summer as normal, a pulse survey could be run to address these issues instead. Karl noted some concern regarding what could be done with the data obtained. He stated that there was an awareness that many staff were experiencing difficulties and that the University had sent out repeated signals regarding this by way of communications and had followed the issue up through the line management structure and in encouraging individual conversations. David sought clarification as to what steps staff should take if they felt their requests had not been listened to. Responding, Karl confirmed that such requests should be referred to the next level
of the organisation, as appropriate or to HR. Karl confirmed that this would be added to the communications to be sent out.

50.2 Tom Rist, representing the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture stated a perceived tension between the desire of the University to maintain things at their normal standard, and the recognition that the circumstances and means of delivery of teaching and research have significantly changed. Tom sought reassurance on the consequences for individuals who find their teaching or research cannot keep to normal standards due to the changed circumstances. Tom asked whether these individuals would face penalties and if the University would produce and publish protocols on these matters. Responding, the Principal confirmed that penalties had not been discussed. He stated the importance of understanding the circumstances colleagues are facing, to be flexible and to take into account the extra burdens that are being carried. He noted the request for the formalisation of this. The Principal sought to reassure the University community that the need for flexibility and pragmatism is understood and that normal expectations simply cannot be met in some circumstances. Karl, also responding, stated that to impose penalties would be directly discriminatory and that the University would not, in any circumstances, do anything that was either directly or indirectly discriminatory. Karl further noted that the Aberdeen 2040 strategy provides the framework for the care for the health, wellbeing and safety of the community.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

51.1 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, introduced the paper on Planning for the Future. He stated that the paper set out for the Senate a list of the groups which had been established and noted that, prior to the meeting, a list of the Senate members elected to each group had also been circulated and the composition of the groups was consequently complete.

51.2 Alfred Akisanya, representing the School of Engineering, asked whether elected Senators, representing Senate on these groups could engage in forums to ensure the feedback they provide is endorsed by Senate. The Principal and Karl proposed the self-organisation of members in doing so and in ensuring transparency in their communications. Alfred proposed a Microsoft Teams group for elected Senate members.

51.3 David Anderson, representing the School of Social Science, asked why the Digital Infrastructure Task and Finish Group did not have an elected Senate representative on it. Responding, Karl confirmed that elected Senate members of the Digital Strategy Committee would act as part of this group.

OPERATION OF SENATE DURING OFF-CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

52.1 At the Senate Business Committee held on 29 April 2020 there was discussion of the establishment of an Emergency Powers Group that could take decisions on behalf of the Senate between scheduled meetings should that be necessary. As colleagues become more familiar with on-line meetings and the technology becomes more robust it was agreed that that a preferred alternative would be to hold shorter more frequent meetings of the full Senate.

OPPORTUNITY FOR SENATE MEMBERS TO RAISE ANY OTHER ITEMS OF ACADEMIC INTEREST FOR DISCUSSION
The Principal informed members of the Senate that some questions had been considered and responded to in advance of the meeting. These are confirmed as follows in 53.2 and 53.3 below.

53.2 Questions received from Tom Rist, representing the School of Language and Literature:

a) *what is the planned division of savings between Schools and Professional Services Directorates?*

Schools core budget £1.2 million; Professional Services core budget £2.9 million; operational spend related to other planned income generating activity, that it is anticipated will not take place. £2.9 million.

b) *precisely how will Schools be expected to make savings? For example, will Schools be asked to make savings equally or will some Schools be prioritised over others; and if so, on what basis? Also, what strategy will the Senior Management Team encourage Schools to follow in making these savings? And what aspects of Schools does the Team consider will be worst affected by its strategy for savings?*

All Schools were asked to categorise their budgets into essential expenditure, optional expenditure and where it was unclear which category expenditure fell into, a category for further discussion. None of the essential budgets have been cut, but a savings target has been set for each school which will need to be met from other budget headings. The Head of School has discretion over which budgets they make savings on. As we have protected essential expenditure, the school should have resource to function, but there will be limited scope for other non-essential spend.

c) *who will be in charge of implementing savings within Schools? Will savings be made for Schools by others, or will Heads of School be tasked with making the savings – and if the latter, what leeway will Heads be given regarding making the savings?*

It is the responsibility of the Heads of Schools to manage their budgets and make the required savings.

d) *is the figure of £7 million the total savings Senior Management Team imagines being required in consequence of the coronavirus, or does the Team envisage further savings further down the line – and if so, of what size and scale?*

We hope we don’t have to make more savings, but if the impact of Covid-19 is more significant or prolonged, then we can’t rule out further savings.

53.3 Questions received from Scott Styles, representing the School of Law:

a) *How are the members of SMT appointed?*

Formal appointment following open advertisement and interviews.

b) *What is SMT’s remit and powers*

Draft remit and powers were drawn up earlier in the session following the changes to PaRC and UMG and the formal establishment of SMT, and subsequently referred to the
University Secretary for feedback as part of his governance review prior to finalisation. Once finalised they will be published.

c) To whom is SMT accountable?

The Senior Management Team is responsible for providing recommendations on the overall strategic direction for the University. It also considers all major initiatives emerging and the resources required to support them. It then proposes these to Senate and Court as appropriate for final approval. Members of SMT are accountable to the Principal; in addition, the University Secretary is accountable to the Senior Governor and Court.

d) Where are SMT’s agendas and minutes published?

It will be a recommendation of the University Secretary’s governance review that the minutes be published.

53.4 The Principal noted that questions, from staff within the School of Geosciences, and two motions, from David Anderson, School of Social Science, had been received. He noted these were closely connected and concerning the change to the term dates for academic year 2020/21.

53.5 On behalf of the School of Geosciences, Jeff Oliver asked a question with regards to the revised term dates. He acknowledged the need for the start date for the first half session of the 2020/21 academic year to be delayed as a consequence of the impact of Covid-19, however, stated concerns amongst members of the School regarding the compressed nature of the half session and the proposal to deliver teaching in a compressed 12 week schedule with increased workloads on staff and students and potential consequences on mental health. He stated the 12 week teaching schedule would require a 50-hour working week for students, based on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and while the exact impact on staff time couldn’t be calculated exactly, it was likely to seriously impact on staff workload and require staff to work through the Christmas break. Furthermore, he stated, that given staff would be working with new and possibly experimental methods of teaching that will require significant time investments and with the likelihood of ongoing disruption to the lives of students and staff, it seems likely that this will add significantly to staff workloads. Jeff proposed a possible solution, as discussed within the School of Geosciences, would be to start the first half session as agreed but with exams taking place after Christmas and with the second half session also starting later than scheduled. Jeff asked whether the Principal would consider this or a similar solution in order to ameliorate student and staff workloads to more acceptable levels.

53.6 Following Jeff’s question to the Principal, a discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Responding to Jeff, Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education), informed Jeff and members of the Senate that marking deadlines had been extended in order to reflect the position for staff previously in place. She stated she appreciated that this deadline was tight but that timelines had been extended as far as possible. Ruth noted that extending these any further would be extremely problematic for students selecting their second half session courses. In terms of workload, assessment and exams, Ruth stated that it would be unlikely that large groups of students could be brought onto campus to be assessed by way of in-person exam. She noted that there were opportunities for Schools to consider
how best to assess their students, beyond the steps already taken to negate the impact of Covid-19. Ruth noted that following meetings with Schools regarding the scope and scale of Blended Learning, that discussions were already underway around approaches to continuous assessment. Regarding workload, Ruth confirmed that as many steps as possible had been taken to support the work to be undertaken and that this support would be kept under review. Finally, Ruth stated that to move the start of the second half session would cause significant scheduling issues, extend the problem further and significantly impact the staff and student experience and potentially impact upon research opportunities for staff in the summer months.

• Responding, Jeff sought clarity around the SCQF and equation of 60 credits to 600 hours for students to undertake study. With respect to exams, Jeff stated he understood that exams were unlikely to take place on campus. Regarding research opportunity, he noted that the format that was being proposed was that followed by the University in previous years.

• The Principal acknowledged the pros and cons of both scenarios and stated the importance of achieving the best possible solution. He noted that this was unlikely to be able to address every issue raised.

• Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, noted that the decision to delay the start of term by two weeks and not more was taken precisely so it would not disturb the rest of the academic year. He stated that a lot of consideration had gone into the proposal, before it was considered and approved by the Senate. He acknowledged the issues associated with workload and that Heads of Schools recognise the need to amend assessment practices to address the difficult workload implications. Karl further stated the consequences of moving the second half session both internally and externally.

• Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Student Recruitment) stated the important of recognising an opportunity in recruiting a greater number of January starts to PGT students. He noted an increase in the number of programmes commencing in January and an anticipated strong uptake of these programmes. Members of the Senate noted that campaigns to attract students to these programmes were underway and that a change to a proposed start date would present significant challenges and could very well be less attractive. He further noted a potential detrimental impact for non-graduating or primarily exchange students.

• Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, reiterated the point raised by Jeff Oliver regarding the SCQF and the hours of study required within the time period.

• Responding, Ruth confirmed that the breakdown of hours is not specifically prescribed and can be calculated across an entire year.

53.7 David Anderson, School of Social Science, was invited to present a motion on the change to term dates, as copied below. David noted that the proposal had followed consultations undertaken in several Schools. He noted that there were concerns regarding workload and the ability of staff to be able to deliver teaching, assess and mark in the timescales presented. He noted assessments such as projects, could be integral and not easily replaced with alternative assessment throughout the term. He stated the feeling of those engaged in the motion to allow the room for all staff to adequately undertake their workload. He stated that the intention was not to legislate but was focussed on concerns that Senate had not been permitted to debate the issues associated with the change to the term dates and that within some Schools, staff voices had not been heard. He stated that proper consultation had not been undertaken and proposed a full discussion on deadlines and their appropriateness.

Senate notes that the Staff Update email circulated on Wednesday 29 April published revised dates for results in the current half session, the dates for the start of the next half session HS1 2020-2021 - and then announced the published dates for the start of HS2 2020-21.
Senators from across the University have held email consultations and MSTEam surgeries on the topic of the impact of the offsetting of HS1 2020-21. Significant numbers of constituents noted, with worry, the 18 day overlap for the return of results and the start of the new term. They also noted the physical impossibility for some of marking and returning results between 18 December and 29 January while simultaneously starting a new teaching term likely with new entrants.

Other constituents did not find difficulty with the new dates but were concerned that those with heavy marking loads be accommodated.

All constituents wished to be consulted on these changes.

Therefore, with the intention of simplifying debate on this matter we have prepared two separate resolutions which can be voted on independently.

1. Senate decides the start of teaching in HS2 be offset to 1 February 2021
2. Senate decides that the deadline for HS1 marks to be finalised be set back to 31 January 2021.

53.8 Following the motion as presented by David Anderson, Lindsay Tibbets, on behalf of the Business School, noted that the issue of a compressed first half session was one with which the Business School had been struggling for years. She noted that appropriately balancing marking and a January intake of PGT students was difficult and put pressure on staff. While noting that some continuous assessment could be undertaken, at the levels 3, 4 and 5 coursework would need to be marked in January or through the Christmas break. Lindsay proposed PGT examiners meetings be held later to accommodate this. She also suggested student choice could be amended to reflect the exceptional times. It was agreed that discussion would continue outwith Senate regarding the possible revision of Examiners’ Meetings for PGT students.

53.9 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on the first part of the motion, as follows:

| In favour of moving the start of the second half session: | 19 |
| Not in favour of moving the start of the second half session: | 81 |
| Abstaining from the vote: | 8 |

A vote having been taken, it was confirmed that motion had not been passed and the term dates would not be further amended.

53.10 Regarding the second part of the motion, it was confirmed that the return of results date had already been amended and the motion was withdrawn.

**REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning at its meetings on 28 April 2020.

1. Omnibus Resolution
The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft Resolution ‘Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees’ (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

The Senate would ask the University Court that, in accordance with the provisions of Section 6 (2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, the draft Resolution be passed forthwith, so that the amended provisions may be applied with effect from date on which they are passed by the University Court.

2. Postgraduate Research Degree Regulation Changes (Covid-19)

The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft changes (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

3. Governance of the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group

The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the proposed governance structure (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

4. Devolved Approval Powers

The UCTL received and discussed a paper on Devolved Approval Powers during the impact of Covid-19 and the actions to approve changes to assessment taken by the Chair, under these Senate agreed procedures. The Chair thanked all those who engaged in discussion of the changes to the procedures associated with the assessment of students at all levels. Members of the Committee noted that the decisions would be reported to the Senate.

5. Revised Assessment and Graduation Dates in 2020 and early 2021

The UCTL noted the final Assessment and Graduation Dates in 2020 and early 2021 as approved by the Committee by way of circulation, prior to the meeting. Members of the Committee noted that these would be published for staff and students imminently.

6. Risk Assessment for Learning and Teaching

The Committee received and discussed an extract of the University’s Risk Assessment in respect of Learning and Teaching, during the impact of Covid-19.

7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The UCTL received the paper providing a summary of the steps taken to bring about inclusion in the altered assessment regimes introduced in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Members of the Committee noted the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all aspects of the work being undertaken by the University and in the preparations for the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year.

8. ‘What Next?’ Communication Strategy

The UCTL received the proposed strategy of communications in respect of Careers and Employability to undergraduate students over the final weeks of the academic year and
beyond, reminding them of the various ways in which the University can continue to support them after graduation or over the summer break.

9. Guidance for Exams Officers and External Examiners

54.9 Members of the Committee received the paper providing guidance for Exams Officers and External Examiners during the impact of Covid-19. Members of the Committee discussed the work being undertaken to communicate with External Examiners and internal Exams Officers in respect of the agreed procedures for assessment during the impact of Covid-19.

10. On-Demand Learning Marketing Strategy Update

54.10 Members of the Committee discussed the updated 2020 marketing strategy for on-demand learning. The Committee acknowledged the strategy as an important and extensive piece of work. Members of the Committee suggested the alignment of the work in the paper with the ‘What Next?’ communication strategy.

11. Resits for PG Projects And Dissertations

54.11 Members of Committee approved the proposal and amendments to the regulations and the Code of Practice on Assessment. The Committee also approved the proposal that students be informed of a failed dissertation/project prior to confirmation at the exam board, in order for them to begin revising their work as soon as possible.

12. Postgraduate Research (PGR) Code of Practice

54.12 The Committee approved the proposed changes to the PGR Code of Practice.

13. Removal of Postgraduate Research (PGR) Initial Skills Audit

54.13 The Committee approved the recommendation from the PGR and Quality Assurance committees to remove the requirement for new PGR students to complete an ISA (except those in receipt of UKRI funding) from Academic Year 2020/21 and to approve wording of a required regulation change.

14. Assessment at All Levels

54.14 Members of the Committee noted the paper, comprising information on the agreed approach to assessment across all levels of study as a consequence of the impact of Covid-19. The paper included information categorised as follows and as previously approved by way of circulation:

   (i) Approaches to Assessment at Levels 1 and 2
   (ii) Assessment at Levels 3, 4 and 5: No Detriment Procedures
   (iii) School of Medicine Approach

15. Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) One Year Follow-Up Report

54.15 Members of the Committee noted the publication of the University’s ELIR one year follow up report, on the QAA website here.

REF UPDATE
55.1 The Senate noted the REF Update (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

**DEVOLVED APPROVAL POWERS**

56.1 The Senate is invited to note the actions taken under devolved approval powers (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

57.1 The Principal thanked members of the Senate for their contribution to discussion. He noted that the next meeting of the Senate would be held in June. He encouraged members to keep in touch in the meantime and to engage in the meetings of elected senators with him.